CHRIST AND HIS COMPANIONS

BY

WILLIAM JENNINGS BRYAN

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Famous Figures of the New Testament

By
WILLIAM JENNINGS BRYAN
Author of "In His Image"; "Seven Questions in Dispute"; Famous Figures of the Old Testament," etc.

NEW YORK CHICAGO
Fleming H. Revell Company
LONDON AND EDINBURGH

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Chicago: 17 North Wabash Ave.
London: 21 Paternoster Square
Edinburgh: 75 Princes Street

Publisher's Note

THE contents of this volume were placed in the hands of Mr. Bryan's publishers some little time before his unexpected and regretted taking-off. The title given the book was chosen by the author himself, and except for the imperatives of physical editing, the studies here presented are as the Great Commoner left them, when he passed on to his rest.

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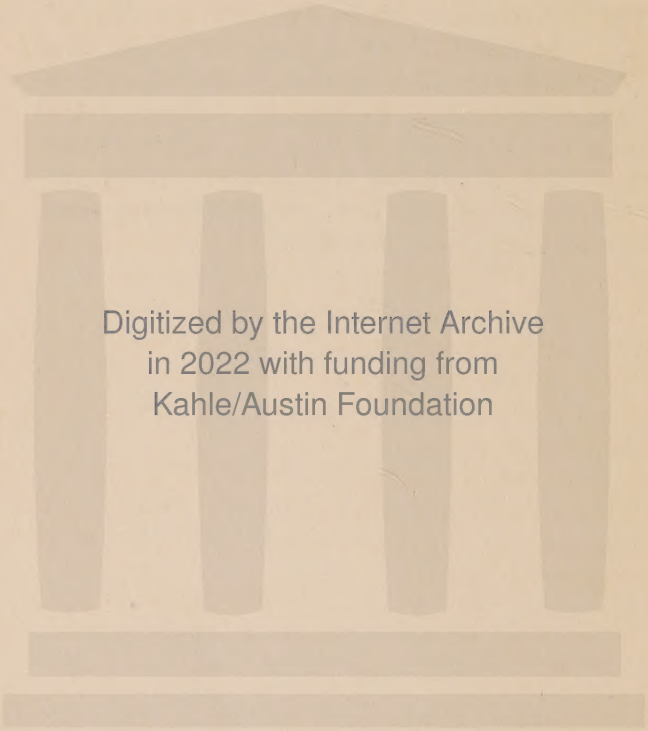
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Author's Foreword

THIS volume offers to the public a number of brief sketches of famous figures in the New Testament. Like those contained in a former volume, *Famous Figures of the Old Testament,* most of them were given originally as Bible Talks and are here brought together in book form, at the request of numerous hearers, with the hope that they will prove useful to Bible students in general and to teachers in particular.

Their publication also carries out a plan, which I have had in my mind for many years, of furnishing Sunday reading for Christians who, because of illness or advanced age, are denied the privilege of regular attendance at church services.

If I succeed in conveying to the minds and hearts of others the deep impression made upon myself by the study of these characters, my purpose will be accomplished.

WILLIAM JENNINGS BRYAN.

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I

INTRODUCTORY: GREAT MEN AND WOMEN OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

WHAT a wonderful group are the men and women of the New Testament, who, while differing in their individuality, unite in presenting and emphasising the central themes of Christianity!

It is the aim and purpose of this series of chapters to glance at some of these characters, and to note their special association with their Master and Lord. As the large majority of my prospective readers are likely to be adults, and many of them not regular members of any Sunday-school, I feel that I can render a service by drawing a contrast between these characters and other groups of representative people known to history. The field is so large that only a few comparisons are possible, and, of necessity, they must be made without elaboration

Where Are the Egyptians?

Take, for instance, the ancient Egyptians.

The Land of the Nile was at one time the centre of the civilisation of its day. Its people inhabited

a territory of wonderful richness and its men of science were the leaders of their time. Its rulers not only lived in luxury but were so ambitious for an earthly immortality that, with the conscripted toil of the poor, they built themselves the most costly tombs that have ever been reared for the dead.

The land was adorned with temples that exhibited a high development of art and architecture; some of the stones used in the construction of these temples were so enormous that we still wonder how they were transported and put in place.

Upon walls still standing are pictures which give us an idea of the cruelties boastfully practised in those far-off days. One, for instance, represents a monarch holding in one hand the twisted hair of a number of helpless subjects while the other hand, grasping a whip, is raised as if he were beating them.

What influence do the mightiest of the Egyptians, whether kings or scholars, exert upon human history today as compared with the humble individuals whom we are to consider in these pages?

With rare exception, they were not among the learned of their day and were without political influence. Nearly all were persecuted and a number of them put to death; yet their story continues to stir the hearts of millions and their lives are still moulding the lives of men and women today.

But we are better acquainted with Greece than with Egypt and with the men of her Golden Age.

The students in our schools and colleges study the poems of Homer, the orations of Demosthenes

and Æschines, the wisdom of Socrates, the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle, the military genius of Miltiades and Themistocles, the statesmanship of Lycurgus, Solon and Pericles, the art of Phidias, the annals of Herodotus and Xenophon, and the tragedies of Æschylus. These men have all contributed to posterity and given to their land an imperishable place in history.

"The Glory That Was Greece."

But it is little that the mass of mankind today knows of the most prominent of these characters.

Demosthenes has taught a few orators how to arrange their arguments and build their climaxes, but not one American in one hundred can quote a sentence that he uttered or has been influenced by a sentiment that he expressed.

A few know that Socrates was forced to drink the cup of hemlock and that his wife acquired a reputation for being disagreeable—though nobody is able to say whether she or her husband is most to blame for her surly disposition—but the words of Socrates have made but little impress upon the current thought of our time.

Plato has his admirers. Scattered here and there are societies formed in his honour where a few of the more learned assemble and discuss his *Dialogues,* but neither his wisdom nor his arguments have reached the rank and file of any land.

Homer, the blind poet, read in translations, charms a selected percentage in literary centres, but none are moved to heroic action by what they read.

And so with all the others. The Greek masters in architecture and in sculpture have their followers, and writers of Grecian history and of plays have helped to form the style of an occasional writer today, but the light of all these stars combined in a single ray is as nothing compared with the light shed by Peter and Paul and John, by Luke and Matthew and Mark.

The influence exerted by all the famous Greeks upon modern life, today, is negligible when compared with the influence of the New Testament characters with whom we shall deal—some of them fishermen, some of them peasants, one a collector of customs, another a publican, and, among the women, the most fortunate and blessed of them all, the wife of a carpenter.

"The Grandeur That Was Rome."

A comparison between these humble New Testament characters and the conspicuous representatives of Roman life and civilization presents a still more striking contrast, for they lived under the same government and more nearly at the same time.

Rome was mistress of the world. The will of her rulers was law over all Europe, and their authority extended into Asia and Africa. Rome, too, had orators like Cicero and Antony, historians like Tacitus and Livy, poets like Virgil and Horace, warriors like Cæsar and Scipio, statesmen like Cato, philosophers like Seneca, and great rulers like Augustus.

Rome had everything except that which Christ

gave to the world and which, through some of these New Testament characters was spread abroad throughout the Empire.

The glory of Rome departed; the eloquence of Cicero barely sufficed to keep the Eternal City from being burned by Cataline and his co-conspirators. Her legions which shook the earth with their tread have crumbled and vanished and the arena in which the gladiators fought with savage beasts has fallen down. Her language, even, is "dead."

Beginners in the study of Latin know that "All Gaul is divided into three parts," but they do not read that the civilization that then existed in any of those parts vitally influences the life of our own time. With Virgil, they sing of "arms and the man," but any one of a hundred Sunday-school songs are better known at this hour than anything Virgil wrote, and have touched more deeply the springs of human conduct.

The "truth" about which Pilate inquired and waited not for an answer, has triumphed over all the forces of which Rome was mistress; it echoed and echoed and echoed until it drowned out all the resounding words embodied in the commands of her generals and in the decrees of her kings.

Why? How is this fact of history to be explained?

Measured by any materialistic test, the friends and disciples of Christ were a feeble folk. They had not the wealth of the rulers of Egypt. They had not the learning of those who walked and taught in the groves of Athens. They had not the

weapons of war which were used with such relentless skill by the Emperors of Rome. And yet they live in the life of humanity and in the thought of society are working out all of the problems of life with the simple lessons taught by the Master and communicated to posterity by His followers.

Nothing But Love.

Carlyle declared that thought was more potent than artillery and that love must be back of thought to give it its power. The men and women whose lives and words are revealed in the New Testament are made immortal by the loving thought which they proclaimed. Christ brought them into vital, living contact with Himself and with the Heavenly Father and they became the conduits through which divine truth found an outlet and reached mankind.

The greatest phase of this truth is, that love, not force, is the conquering influence among men, as silent in its operation as the forces of nature and as irresistible. Like the lightning, love can melt any substance, however hard—even the heart which can become harder than any stone. Like the wind, love can sweep away all opposition and demolish all the barriers raised to resist it; like water, love is a cleansing flood; it can do more—it can remove from guilty hands the blood spots that all ocean waters cannot wash out.

Love is the great lifting power of which Christ is the supreme example—"*I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me*"—and of

which His disciples and their companions were lesser examples.

This love that stretches from the throne of God to the heart of man can reach to the lowest level and reclaim the most sinful, if only they repent. It gave to the thief upon his cross promise of Paradise; it has lifted up from the depths of despair souls that were thought to be lost; it has washed them white and filled them with a passion for service.

Love Triumphant.

The undying influence exerted by the heroes and heroines of the New Testament is explained by the love that filled their heart and gave lustre to their lives—a love, the limits of which are so far-flung that even an enemy cannot travel beyond its bounds. It brought the Saviour from heaven to save men from their sins.

The highest expression of this love is found in the spirit of forgiveness—the most distinguished virtue of the Christian religion. In the teachings of Jesus, as nowhere else, do we find forgiveness enjoined as a fundamental part of a moral code.

While others vainly tried to overcome their antagonists with weapons of violence, Christ's followers disarmed their enemies by forgiving them. "*Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do,*" spoken down from the Cross amid the agonies of the dying hour, was caught up by Stephen the martyr, and passed from generation to generation.

Dr. Charles E. Jefferson, in his book entitled *Fundamentals,* pictures the continuous progress of Christianity. He describes Christ as walking on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, gathering about Him a few disciples; then he sees the spirit of Christ travelling around the shores of the Mediterranean and gathering a still larger group of disciples; then around the shores of the Atlantic and then around the shores of the Pacific, until His followers have carried His Gospel over all seas and into all lands.

Is it not worth while to be numbered among so goodly a company and learn of the Master through them and with them? Is it not worth while to catch the spirit that led them to treasure even above life itself the priceless truths of which they were ambassadors?

We may well pray for a double portion of their spirit and, having caught that spirit, strive that we, like they, may not be "disobedient to the heavenly vision."

II

"CHRIST IS BORN IN BETHLEHEM"

LUKE 2:7-20

AND so we turn from the Old Testament to the New—from the patriarchs and prophets of Israel to the only begotten Son of God, whom a Jewish writer has described as follows:

"Yet, these things apart, who can compute all that Jesus has meant to humanity?

"The love He has inspired, the solace He has given, the good He has engendered, the hope and joy He has kindled—all that is unequalled in human history.

"Among the great and good that the human race has produced, none has even approached Jesus in universality of appeal and sway.

"He has become the most fascinating figure in history; and in Him is combined what is best and most enchanting and most mysterious in Israel—the wonderful people whose child He was.

"The Jew cannot help glorying in what Jesus thus has meant to the world; nor can he help hoping that Jesus may yet serve as a bond of union between Jew and Christian, once His teaching is better known and the bane of misunderstanding is at last removed from His words and His ideals."

Only two writers, Matthew and Luke, attempt a description of the birth of Christ. They agree in every *important* detail; they describe the delivery of the angels' message to both Mary and her betrothed husband.

Mary inquired how she, a virgin, could become the mother of the child? The angel explained it to her. You will notice that Mary was the first person to be sceptical on this subject, and the account is strengthened by the fact that the explanation was given in answer to her questionings.

Christ Was Not An Evolution.

Christ was not an evolution, the climax of a line of geniuses each greater than the one preceding him. It is important to mark that there had been a period of four hundred years during which no great Jewish leader had appeared. As the end of this remarkable era drew near, there was an increasing air of expectancy. The promises regarding the Messiah were read and re-read, especially the words of Isaiah, quoted in Matthew: "*Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.*"

One of the most wonderful and richest chapters in all the Bible is the second chapter of the Gospel according to Luke.

It is the chapter that gives us the most detailed and beautiful account of the birth of Jesus. It is the chapter that tells of the good tidings of great

joy brought to the shepherds keeping watch over their flock by night. It is the chapter that records the most beautiful hymn of praise angels and men have ever sung: "*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.*"

The birthday which, together with the first chapter of Matthew, it records is the only birthday the anniversary of which is widely celebrated throughout the civilized world.

Each nation has its great characters to whom succeeding generations pay homage. In the United States we have the birthday of Washington, the Father of his Country. He has been dead but a little more than a century and only a small part of the nation's population observes the day set apart by statute in remembrance of his services.

Many cease from ordinary work because it is a holiday, but comparatively few give serious thought to the virtues and accomplishments of George Washington.

Abraham Lincoln's birthday is also observed throughout the nation, yet a still smaller number observe it in the spirit which prompted the passage of the law. Lincoln was the greatest of Republicans as Jefferson was the greatest of Democrats, and yet while their names are invoked in campaigns for political purposes the birthdays of these two great statesmen attract little attention.

Even Independence Day, the birthday of the nation, is given over to amusement rather than to sober reflection on the nation's past struggles, its present problems and its future greatness.

But Christ's birthday is looked forward to throughout the Christian world—not by Christians alone, but by unbelievers as well. No other babe has ever brought so much joy into the world.

"And since the Child of Nazareth
Set on it thus His seal and sign,
Who—till man's sin hath marred it—saith
That childhood is not still divine?"

We compute time from Christ's advent—the Christian era starts with His birth. Is it not strange that any should speak disrespectfully of One who has so profoundly impressed the world? It is more than strange—it is amazing—that some children to whom Christmas was once the great day of the year should, even before they reach maturity, begin to speak lightly of One, at whose coming the angels sang the song of peace on earth, good will to men; whose star led the Wise Men to the manger at Bethlehem.

The Story of the Shepherds.

They were told that they would find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger; and they went to verify the message that they had received. They found that Mary, the mother of the babe, and her husband, Joseph, were lodged in a stable *"because there was no room for them in the inn."*

When the shepherds found that the facts corresponded with the description given by the angels, they made known what they had heard, and all

wondered. Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had seen and heard. *"But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart."*

An Issue for Nineteen Hundred Years.

The truth or falsity of this simple story has been an issue for nineteen hundred years. All comment upon the birth of the Saviour must be upon one assumption or the other; if we assume that the account is true, we need only take the words in their natural meaning and accept the testimony as we accept the record in other matters.

The objection raised by those who dispute the Virgin Birth does not rest upon interpretation—there is no ambiguity; neither does it rest upon conflicting testimony—there is nothing on the other side.

The denial of the truth of the Bible account of Christ's birth rests on the assertion that either the Virgin Birth was impossible or improbable.

To declare it impossible, questions the power of God and is virtually atheism.

If God is the author of life, there is no limit to His power; neither is there limit to His ways. The birth of Christ is no more mysterious than the birth of any one of us; it is simply different.

If God is God, it was as easy for Him to bring Christ into the world in the manner described by Matthew and Luke as it is for Him to bring ordinary human beings into the world by the ordinary method of procreation.

Life is the greatest of all mysteries; we know as little about it today as was known in the dawn of creation. We have made no progress whatever in solving the mystery of life, whether it be the life of the vegetable, the brute, or man. All have required Infinite power as well as Infinite intelligence.

A False Premise.

Because the creation of life is beyond the power even of man, immeasurably the nearest approach to God in power and intelligence, few have the hardihood to discard the Virgin Birth as an impossibility.

Those who reject the Bible account usually do so on the ground that it is improbable.

But, in reaching this conclusion, they begin with a false premise. They first degrade Christ by bringing Him down to the level of man, and then they contend that because no human being was ever born as Christ is described as having been born, therefore such a birth is improbable.

If they would only leave Christ in the *God class,* instead of bringing Him down to the *man class,* they would have no reason for questioning what is said about Him.

If Christ had been only a man, His birth would have been like the birth of other men.

But Christ was "*the only begotten Son of God*"; why should it seem unreasonable that God's Son should be conceived by the Holy Ghost?

What more natural than that the Son of God should have had God for His Father?

Christ was not only born like a God, but He lived like a God, suffered like a God, and died like a God, and, like a God, broke the bonds of the tomb and ascended into heaven.

A Consistent Story.

The whole story is consistent and becomes a perfectly reasonable story when all the facts are taken into consideration. It is perfectly reasonable to attribute such results to such a cause.

If Christ had been only a man, there would have been no prophecy foretelling His coming; there would have been no Wise Men following the star until it stood over the manger; there would have been no angelic hosts singing to the startled shepherds the song that will some day be the international anthem—peace and good will.

If Christ had been but a man, the Christian Church would not have been built upon Him and He would not have become the greatest Fact in history and the growing Figure of all time.

There is Proof Enough.

No rules can explain what He was and said and did. We accept by faith that which we cannot prove, but we can prove enough to make it certain that He was superhuman.

He was reared in a carpenter shop and John called him unlettered. And yet, He gave the world a code of morality to which all the learned men have been unable to add a single sentence and from which all the scholars have been unable to take a word.

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If Christ were but a man, why has not some other man appeared who may be regarded as even an approximate rival?

If Christ were but a man, the fact that there has been but one Christ would be a serious reflection upon our institutions of learning and the intelligence of the age.

If Christ were not superhuman, what reason could be given for the failure of an equal of Christ to appear?

Christ's wisdom was not absorbed from the world outside; it was inherent in Him: "*I have meat to eat that ye know not of.*"

The Pitfall of "If."

By what rule can we exclude the description of the birth of Christ as untrue, and then accept as true the testimony of discredited writers?

If Matthew were in error when he described Christ as conceived of the Holy Ghost and born of the Virgin Mary, how do we know that he was not in error when he attributed to Christ the Sermon on the Mount—a code of ethics surpassing anything that man had known before or has learned since?

If we cannot trust the words of Matthew and Luke as to Christ's birth, how can we be sure Christ ever lived?

Prof. P. Carnegie Simpson, in his book, *The Fact of Christ,* begins by citing the undisputed record of what Christ was and said and did. From these undisputed facts he draws the conclusion that

such a person as Christ is known to have been cannot be explained except as Christ is explained.

He spake as never man spake because He was more than man.

He did as man never did before because He was God manifest in the flesh.

The Only Christ There Is.

The *supernatural Christ is the only Christ* there is—the supernatural element is the secret of His vitality.

Had He been merely a man, He would not have survived His generation. Nothing is more reasonably established than that His supernatural birth is absolutely inseparable from His work and an indispensable part of His very being.

He was every inch a God and is as much alive today as when Mary, "highly favoured," "blessed among women," showered upon Him a mother's love.

The peace that was promised by the angels at His birth, is still the only peace to which the weary heart and a war-worn world can look with any sort of confidence; and, one day, that peace—the peace that passeth all human understanding—shall prevail in the earth, from sea to rolling sea.

III

CHRIST AND HIS PARENTS

LUKE 2: 40-52

BETWEEN the previous chapter, which dealt with Christ's birth, and this present one, which deals, chiefly, with a certain incident in His boyhood, twelve years have passed. The writers of the Gospels give us but three glimpses of the days during which the child Jesus "*grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom.*"

Luke tells us that at the age of eight days the Babe was circumcised and formally given the name "Jesus"—the name ascribed to him by the angel who announced His coming to Mary. The reason given for the name was that He [Jesus] would save His people from their sins.

Luke also records the testimony borne by Simeon and Anna to the supernatural character of Jesus.

The Flight into Egypt and the Return.

Matthew tells us of the third incident—the flight into Egypt.

When the Wise Men came to Jerusalem in search of the newly born "king of the Jews," Herod was troubled.

Finding that the prophecies located the birth of

the Messiah in Bethlehem, he sent the Wise Men there under promise to return and report to him. He pretended that he wanted the information that he might worship the Babe, but his real reason was disclosed later when, disappointed because the Magi, warned in a dream, returned by another way, he ordered all the male children in Bethlehem under two years of age to be put to death.

This fact, recorded in a few words, reveals the change that has taken place since the days of Herod in the exercise of arbitrary power. Nineteen hundred years ago, a king could do as he pleased, even to the extent of putting men, women, and children to death without reason or cause. Some monarchs can still declare war and so cause thousands to be slaughtered on the battlefield, but they cannot otherwise butcher indiscriminately as they did in olden times.

When Joseph and Mary learned of the wicked plans of Herod they hurried the child away into Egypt. This incident has furnished the artists of the world one of the most fascinating child-pictures of Bible records. When Herod died an angel appeared unto Joseph and informed him that it was safe to take the Babe back to the Holy Land.

The words employed by the heavenly messenger —"*They are dead that sought the young child's life*"—have often been quoted when a great reform has been accomplished for the protection of the young.

Matthew relates how that Joseph "*arose and took the young child and his mother and came into*

the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus did reign in Judæa in the room of his father Herod he was afraid to go thither; notwithstanding being warned of God he turned aside into the parts of Galilee, and he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth." And Luke tells us that *"the Child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon Him."*

Reared in a Humble Home.

The fact that He was sent into a humble home and surrounded in His youth by everyday people is not without significance.

Man's birth, so far as he is concerned, is a matter of chance. He is not consulted as to the age in which he shall be born or as to the nation or the race or the family. Because man is thus the child of chance, both as to his birth and as to his going hence, he has never been able to solve the riddle of life without revelation.

It is only when he learns that he was created, not as other things were made, but in the image of God, put in charge of all the earth and made responsible for the wise use of every moment of his life, every atom of his power and every ounce of his influence, that he is able to account for his presence here.

Christ, coming into the world with a heavenly mission, becomes the divinely conceived child of a virgin mother and spends His youth among the plain folk of Nazareth. He was to present a simple

Gospel to which the common people would listen gladly; which would appeal to mankind. In what other environment could He have passed from infancy to the days of His ministry?

Christ's First Journey to Jerusalem.

But the main incident to be dealt with in this chapter is the only one recorded in the Scripture which lies between the babyhood of Jesus and the commencement of His earthly ministry—His first journey to Jerusalem and His appearance among the rabbis in the Temple.

At the age of twelve He went with his parents to Jerusalem to the Feast of the Passover, a day which the children of Israel observed for nearly twenty centuries.

When the parents started back home Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem. As there was quite a company of these devout Jews returning together, the absence of the Child was not noticed until the end of a day's journey, when they sought Him among kinsfolk and acquaintances.

As soon as they found that He was not with them they hurried back to Jerusalem and, after three days, found Him in the Temple, "*sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them and asking them questions.*" Luke tells us that all that heard Him were amazed at His understanding and His answers.

His parents were astonished at what they saw and the mother, remembering with what alarm they had searched for Him, chided Him for causing

them so much anxiety. The answer made by Jesus showed at what an early age He entered upon the serious business of His life:

"Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" He asked.

They did not catch the full meaning of His words; but the mother—as mothers are wont to do —*"kept all these sayings in her heart."*

Let us look at one or two salient points in this incident of the boyhood of Jesus, which furnish us with thoughts on which to dwell and emphasise.

Jesus Had a Good Home.

First, His mother was a devout woman and her husband, Joseph, was as scrupulous as she in attendance upon religious ceremonies. The fact that the children of Israel observed the Feast of the Passover for seventeen hundred years before the beginning of the Christian era would seem to furnish weighty support to, if not conclusive proof of, the facts which the feast commemorated.

There is much complaint heard, today, that children lack interest in spiritual things and are given over more than formerly to the pleasures of the flesh. Some allowance must be made, however, for the greater and cheaper diversions of the day.

Travel is much easier than in olden days, and costs much less. Travel has an educational value, and the acquiring of information is laudable; it should not be discouraged unless it interfere with things more important. But, after making due

allowance for the compelling influences, physical and intellectual, which turn the mind away from religion, it can hardly be denied that home-life has suffered, especially where the family altar has been abandoned and material attractions have been permitted to engross the thought and colour the conversation at the fireside.

The temptations that come with mature life have not been reduced in number or force—they have rather been increased, and the need is therefore greater for that spiritual preparedness that only religion can furnish.

The home environment that surrounded Christ in His boyhood was as good as the times could furnish; if we had the same kind of environment in more homes today, a larger number of children would find it easier to follow in His footsteps.

Supernatural Wisdom.

"*And it came to pass,*" says Luke (chap. 2, v. 6), "*that after three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions. And all that heard Him were amazed at His understanding and answers.*"

Here we have evidence of the supernatural wisdom of Jesus. He was only twelve and His ability to ask and answer questions amazed the teachers and others who heard Him.

There was no human source from which He could have drawn the knowledge that He mani-

fested. He did not find it in the carpenter shop in which He spent His leisure hours, or secure it from those who taught in the Temple. His wisdom at the age of twelve was heaven-born, as was the wisdom that later blazed forth in the Sermon on the Mount and in His other discourses.

"My Father's Business."

Verse forty-eight of this same chapter has been used as the basis of a criticism; why did Jesus give His mother reason for worry? His answer explained it: "*Know ye not that I must be about my Father's business?*" Or, as the American Standard Version has it: "*In my Father's house?*" It matters not which version we use; the emphasis is placed upon the word "Father's," which is the same in both translations.

The Divine mission which brought Jesus to earth so overshadowed His humanity that, even at twelve years of age, the passion for service made Him mature beyond His years. Other boys at that age are in need of parental direction, but Jesus found His place in His Father's house and His work in His Father's business.

Mary, His mother, was constantly surprised at her son; she did not comprehend the largeness of the plan of salvation. How could she? Even the disciples could not comprehend it until after Christ had risen from the dead. With the mother, the unfolding of this plan continued until she stood weeping beside the Cross on Calvary and was committed to the care of John, the beloved Apostle.

It is not a digression to add that parents sometimes underestimate the readiness of their children to enter upon their Father's work. Faith develops much earlier than the reason—love earlier than logic.

The Wisdom of Solomon and the Invitation of Jesus.

Some parents have made the mistake of advising their children to delay becoming members of the Church; such parents take a great risk. Solomon's advice was wiser: "*Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them.*"

Christ presented the subject still more forcibly when He said: "*Suffer little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of heaven.*"

If children should not postpone the acceptance of Christ, what shall we say of the folly of adults who are slow to enter upon "the Father's business?" There is none of us who should not put to himself this question: "How large a place does religion occupy in my life?"

Man's Highest Duty.

Only one day in seven is reserved for physical rest and spiritual nourishment, and still the spiritual element must dominate the intellectual as well as the physical if life is to be normal or successful.

If the world were made according to a plan, man

must be a part—a supreme part—of that plan, and can have no higher duty than to learn God's will concerning himself in order that he may do it.

The "Father's business" is the all-important business; it can not be ignored. Happy are those who go about their "Father's business" and remain in it, and faithful to it, until called to their reward.

Jesus returned to Nazareth with Joseph and Mary and was subject unto them, and He "*increased in wisdom and stature and in favour with God and man.*" His growth was harmonious and well-rounded. As He grew in stature He grew in wisdom; as He found favour with God, He also found favour with man.

Man is a Trinity.

There is an important lesson in that simple declaration. Civilization might be defined as the harmonious development of body and mind and heart.

Some give all the attention to the body, some give all the attention to the mind and a few are so absorbed in spiritual development that they slight both body and mind. Man is a trinity—body, mind and soul; the same Creator gave all three, and gave them to be used.

The Christian life unites intellectual strength to physical perfection and then places both mind and body under spiritual supervision. Christ, though supernatural in birth and Divine in His mission, was natural in His development.

And so it was intended that each individual should find "*favour with God and man.*" There is no inconsistency between righteousness and popularity. Righteousness brings one into harmony with God and Christ-like sympathy gives him the good will of his fellows.

The Example of the Boy Christ.

Christ, even in His boyhood, gives us an example of growth in body, in mind and in grace. A boy, as well as a man, can be Christlike. Jesus as a boy is an example to boys and girls, just as He, when grown, is an example to men and women.

Our Sunday-school teachers and parents of children are not living up to their possibilities and duties unless they impress upon the young the practical character of Christ's teachings. They are for the present life as well as for the life to come. Christ brought life as well as immortality to light. He came that men might have life, and have it more abundantly.

The Wise Men welcomed Him at His birth; the wise men in the Temple were astonished as the child-Christ questioned and answered their questions; the wise of today may well stand in awe as they witness the spread of Christ's teachings. He is the only growing Figure in all the world.

IV

CHRIST AND JOHN THE BAPTIST

MARK 1:1-11; LUKE 3:2-22; 7:4-28

MARK begins his Gospel with the preaching of John the Baptist. While Matthew and Luke give us detailed accounts of the birth of Jesus and record incidents relating to His babyhood and childhood, Mark passes over in silence all of the life of our Lord until He appears before John to be baptized.

The Baptist was a relative of Jesus, their mothers being cousins. He was born to Elisabeth in answer to prayer and was a Nazarite, pledged to total abstinence. He was separated from the world—set apart for the exemplification of the highest purpose and the strictest morality.

A child of the desert, where he lived on locusts and wild honey, and clothed himself with camel's hair, *"and with a girdle of skin about his loins,"* John dressed his thought in the language with which he was familiar.

"O generation of vipers," he cried, *"who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?"*

John was a forerunner—the greatest of all the men of this type that history has known. And his message was the greatest message because it ushered in the Saviour of mankind.

Most of the great turning points in history are like the summits of some mountain ranges, approached so gradually that one hardly knows when he has crossed the divide. Forerunners sometimes go in groups, each succeeding member of the group carrying the banner a little farther, until it is finally planted upon the eminence toward which all were marching, even though unconscious of the ultimate goal.

But sometimes a forerunner comes upon the scene swiftly,—suddenly—and this was the case with John. There had been a long era—some four centuries—between the days of the great prophets and the coming of Christ. In all that time there was no towering figure to challenge attention, but there was an air of expectancy—a sort of lull before the storm. All at once John appeared, fully prepared for the work upon which he was about to enter.

The Voice in the Wilderness.

In describing himself, he quotes the words of Isaiah: "*The voice of one crying in the wilderness.*"

This is wonderfully expressive; it suggests boldness on the part of the one described and intimates also that his words were unwelcome. He was ready to encounter opposition; his purpose was so strong that he needed not the encouragement of the multitude. His work was mapped out beforehand; he was "*to prepare the way of the Lord.*" The crooked paths were to be made straight and "*all flesh*" was to "*see the salvation of God.*"

As we have seen, he scorned the customary dress and his language was as unconventional as his appearance. He did not use any conciliatory phrases in addressing the multitude which gathered to hear him.

No Honeyed Words.

"I beg your pardon," "I venture to suggest," "I hope you will permit me to say"—such courteous means of approach were entirely foreign to his nature. On the contrary, those who went out to be baptized of him were called "*a generation of vipers,*" and he inquired who had warned them to "*flee from the wrath to come?*"

He was not satisfied with lip service; he enjoined upon them to bring forth fruits worthy of repentance. It was not sufficient for them to say, "*We have Abraham to our father*": God, he declared, "*is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.*"

He worshipped the God whose power was unlimited—a God who could both reward and punish. No other appeal would have fitted into the time or met the requirements of the occasion.

"*Repent Ye—*"

Repentance was John's message to the Hebrew world, and it was a message good for all time.

Repentance is the beginning of reform. No one can begin a new life until he recognises that he has sinned, and turns from sin. Such a man may reflect upon his past; he may consider the sorrow and

suffering that follow in the wake of sin and yet continue to sin. It is not until he repents—turns back—that there is any hope for him. The sense of sin precedes salvation—"*God be merciful to me a sinner*" is the prayer that reaches the throne. It unlocks the door to God's forgiveness.

Fortunately, repentance can be as instantaneous as the decision that leads one into wrong doing.

A man may contemplate stealing for a long time; he may count the money and calculate the possibility of escape, but it only requires an instant to become a thief—the instant in which he resolves to take that which is not his own.

So one may ponder over a wrong, real or fancied, and cherish revenge, but it only takes an instant to resolve to be a murderer.

So the Prodigal Son doubtless reviewed his downward course and recalled the pleasures of his home, but it required only the instant to say, "*I will arise and go to my father.*"

"*Do Violence to No Man.*"

John the Baptist was a mighty preacher. He poured his whole soul into his work; his words shook his hearers loose from indifference and brought them face to face with their own iniquity. His words penetrated their hearts and stirred new resolves.

He was not only a preacher, but he had the wisdom to advise those who came unto him.

The inquirers are divided by Luke into three classes. Reversing the order given in the Gospel,

let us consider first John's answer to the soldiers who asked, "*And what shall we do?*"

He said unto them: "*Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages.*" He dealt with the special temptations that they were subject to.

"*Do violence to no man*"—it is difficult for one to have power without abusing it.

A soldier has not only the physical advantage that comes with a strong body, but he has the greater advantage that comes with the use of weapons.

The difference between the armed and the unarmed is much greater today than it was in the day of John the Baptist. We have the revolver and the repeating rifle, the machine-gun and shells. During the World War I met a manufacturer who had a contract for three million shells; each was guaranteed to burst into one hundred and twelve pieces—think of the butchery!

Today, a few are a match for a multitude, but even nineteen hundred years ago the soldier was able to extort from the civilian, and John warned them against yielding to this temptation.

"*Neither accuse any falsely.*" When injustice is done it is usually excused by false accusation. The sin of false swearing is so common that the ninth commandment is directed against it: "*Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.*"

The third sin against which he warned, "*Be content with your wages,*" might be construed as enjoining respect for government.

The soldier is the agent of the government, its arm in the exercise of authority. Mutiny among soldiers is a high crime and desire for increase in wages is sometimes the cause of such an uprising.

When the publicans came to John and said, "*What shall we do?*" his answer dealt with the sin most common among them—"*Exact no more than that which is appointed you.*"

The collection of taxes does not tend to make one popular, but the taxgatherer arouses the minimum of resentment when there is no doubt about his integrity. If to that which he is authorised to collect he adds graft for himself, he becomes an object of contempt.

John would make the way of public officials as easy as possible by keeping them within the line of duty.

John's Advice for Every Man.

But the Baptist's answer to the multitude was intended for all. To the people's query, "*What shall we do, then?*" he replied: "*He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise.*"

This lays stress on sympathy, the deepest human chord; it is lack of sympathy that causes most of the distress in this world.

The Ten Commandments forbid the doing of evil, but obedience to them is not built upon sympathy. We must, as a matter of justice, refrain from injuring others, but this would be a cold world if there were nothing warmer in it than justice.

Possibly justice would approach more nearly to sympathy if it were interpreted in a larger way.

Social injustice is often the cause of want among the poor. When hard times come the poorest suffer first and most. Because some escape suffering we are prone to condemn the poor for not making provision for emergencies; they are not always to blame.

The Sympathy All Should Feel.

The individual cannot excuse himself for refusing to aid the needy if the suffering is due to something which he has joined in bringing about, or has failed to prevent when it was in his power. John is dealing with that sympathy which all should feel—the sympathy that is invoked when one has become acquainted with one who needs.

Christ expresses this in His great command—*"Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself."*

This does not mean that one is not to love himself—if he did not love himself it would be of little value to another to be loved as he loves himself.

The love that one has for himself is based upon necessity for self-preservation; this is the love to which sympathy appeals. If we feel about others' needs as we do about our own we will share with them to the extent of our ability and their need.

Organized charity has to some extent relieved the needy, but to the extent that it has done so, it has denied to the individual the real pleasure that

comes from a personal knowledge of aid personally given to those who deserve help.

John Taken for the Messiah.

No wonder some among the many hearing John asked in their hearts whether he were the Christ? The wisdom that he manifested set him apart from those to whom they were accustomed. John promptly answered them all in the same way: "*I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose; he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire.*"

He recognised that he was not the looked-for Messiah; he was content to be the forerunner; he must prepare the way. He understood the nature of the expected One and was proud to precede Him. He was a courier; he ran ahead and announced the coming of his Messiah.

"*And it came to pass in those days, that Jesus came from Nazareth, of Galilee, and was baptized of John in the Jordan.*"

Jesus gave many lessons in obedience to form, none more striking than the one recorded in this first chapter of Mark.

It is needless to say that baptism was not necessary in His case—He had no sins to wash away. One who could Himself baptize with the Holy Ghost needed not to be baptized with water, but the Saviour was careful to leave nothing undone that the law required.

He submitted Himself to the law, thus com-

mending and confirming the law; He went farther and declared that the law would not be changed until all was fulfilled.

The Force of Jesus' Example.

Jesus was not a formalist in the sense that He placed the letter of the law above the spirit, but, while enjoining the observance of the law in its spirit, He set an example of observing the form and letter of the law as well.

May we not find a lesson in this for ourselves?

It is useless to quibble about whether baptism is necessary; it is prescribed, as are other matters of form. What pleasure or profit can one find in substituting his own opinion for directions so clearly given and so easily followed?

Christ not only endorsed baptism by submitting to the ordinance Himself in the very beginning of His ministry, but He commanded baptism after His resurrection from the dead.

In His last communion with His disciples, He said: "*Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.*"

It will be noticed that Christ included Himself as one of the Trinity in whose name the ordinance of baptism should be administered.

"*And straightway coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens opened, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon him.*"

The dove is to us the symbol of innocence and gentleness. When Christ was on earth, the dove

had, in addition to these symbolic meanings, that of sacrifice. The poor who could not afford to buy a lamb for a blood offering were permitted to bring doves. The dove and the lamb were offered on the altar.

Heavenly Approval.

"And there came a voice from heaven saying, Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

This testimony was not needed for Christ's own assurance; He was always conscious of the Father's approval. They were in constant communication, if indeed communication were necessary between two united as the Father and Son were in their companionship.

The approval, however, was impressive to those who beheld the descending of the dove and who heard the voice that came out of the heavens.

Twice afterward a voice commended Him—at the transfiguration and in the courts of the Temple.

The Joy of Kinship.

This endorsement, thrice bestowed, was expressed in just such language as a loving Father would employ to an only begotten Son who had proven His love by His willingness to give His life that the world might through Him be saved from sin.

And what can God's children receive, today, that will give them more joy than assurance that they

are beloved by the Father for service rendered to their fellow men?

If we are to have the joy that comes from the consciousness of our kinship with the Father, how can we manifest our appreciation of it better than by Christ-like service to all the rest of the children of our Heavenly Father?

Jesus' Tribute to John.

Later, in His public ministry, Jesus gave a striking endorsement of John. He questioned the multitude concerning John: "*What went ye out into the wilderness to see?*" and suggests the least stirring of sounds, "*A reed shaken with the wind? But what went ye out to see? A man clothed in soft raiment?*"

To emphasize the absurdity of such a reason, He reminded them that those who are gorgeously apparelled or live delicately are in king's houses. Then, having focussed attention upon the subject by previous inquiries, He began to exalt John. He was more than a prophet; he was a special messenger sent upon a special mission, and a mission of supreme importance.

Then He pronounced the highest praise that could be given to anyone, namely, "*Among those that are born of women there is not a greater prophet than John.*" And yet, "*He that is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.*"

Here we have a remarkable comparison. Even such work as John was to do, and which he did with such perfect fidelity, gave John no superior claim to praise.

John died for the truth. He angered a woman when he refused to overlook her sin, and died a victim of her wrath.

But what difference does it make how one dies? Life is short at best, and the agonies of death are not long drawn out. The consciousness of duty done is sufficient recompense.

A Recipe for Happiness.

The worshipper of ease, rich foods, physical luxury, and so forth, is not to be envied; he is not as happy as the Christian who has honest work for his hands, useful employment for his mind and tasks that satisfy his heart.

Karl Hilty, a Swiss writer, gives this recipe for happiness—it is the one that the Christian follows. Joy comes, not to those who seek it, but to those who follow the path of duty.

And, now, what chief lesson has the story of John the Baptist for us?

John was an excellent illustration of the effectiveness of unconventional methods. As we have already noted, Jesus, in describing him, intimated that his dress, uncouth as it was, was appropriate for his work and in keeping with his environment.

There is quite a difference of opinion among Christians as to the kind of preaching that is most effective.

Some want a subdued sermon, perfect in rhetoric and sonorous in delivery. They feel that calmness

befits the dignity of the house of God. Some are doubtless won by such methods who might be repelled by what they call "sensational" appeals. It takes all kinds of preaching to reach all kinds of people, and any kind of preaching is good if it reaches the heart and turns sinners to righteousness.

But it is not fair for any particular class to set its method up as the only proper method. The test is whether the Lord rewards the evangelist with souls for his hire.

The preacher who speaks softly to a sleeping congregation is not in position to condemn as improper the vehemence that shocks the wrong doer into penitence and opens the way for the greatest of all miracles—the changing of the human heart so that the person actually hates the things he once loved and loves the things he once hated.

God's Varying Methods.

We cannot improve upon the plans of the Almighty and we find that His methods are various and often in sharp contrast one with another.

The very air that we breathe usually moves past us in the form of a gentle, refreshing breeze, but sometimes this same air, set in motion by unforeseen forces, sweeps us along with it despite all efforts that we make to resist its powers.

So with water; it is the daily need of every living thing, and usually falls in pleasant showers, but this same water becomes irresistible when it rolls down in a flood or, in the form of mighty

waves, tosses the largest vessels as if they were but chips.

Fire, too, furnishes a contrast as great. What more cheering than the blazing logs upon the hearth? And what more destructive than the conflagration that licks up great buildings or mows down towering forests?

Some sinners need wind and flood and fire to separate them from their false gods and bring them to the worship of Jehovah. John the Baptist was tempest and billow and flame; he overcame the resistance that would have mocked one less heroic or volcanic.

Human Consciousness of Sin.

Consciousness of sin is natural to man. Tolstoy, in rebuking what he called the "cultured crowd," says that religion is not superstition and does not rest upon a vague fear of the unseen forces of nature, but does rest "on man's consciousness of his finiteness amid an infinite universe and of his sinfulness." This consciousness, he adds, man can never outgrow.

It was this consciousness of sin that was awakened by the vehemence of John. He was an evangelist and this was one of the earliest of religious revivals.

Some are inclined to under-rate, if they do not entirely discredit, the revival; they call it a "religious spasm" and discredit it as a transient outburst of emotion.

They can understand how one can wander away

from the path of rectitude, as the prodigal son did, but they cannot comprehend the sudden change that took place when he said, "I will arise and go to my father."

The Purpose of Preaching.

There is no warrant in the Bible for this hostility to seasons of revival when the quest for souls is pursued with more than ordinary zeal and when extraordinary methods are employed to compel attention and to hasten decision.

The purpose of preaching is to persuade, and people differ widely as to the easiest way of approach.

A few may be more easily won by calmness of manner and literary excellence of speech, but the multitude yield more readily when the assault is made upon the heart and conviction is wrought by impetuous argument and powerful illustration. Sin is a revolting fact, but its hideousness must be realised before one will turn from it with an aversion sufficiently strong to be characterised as repentance.

To some it may be more pleasant to consider sin as only an error, differing in degree from other errors according to the results that follow.

There is no excuse for such a view. There is a very distinct line between error and sin. The former is mental, while the latter is a matter of the heart.

Errors are innumerable—"To err is human." We continually make mistakes in calculation and

draw false conclusions from premises that are true as well as from false premises. We may suffer for these errors as the child suffers from burns and from falls. Information will correct mistakes.

Sin, on the contrary, is wilful disobedience to God—the doing of that which we know to be wrong. It is not due to lack of information and therefore more information will not cure it. Nothing but repentance will cure sin, and that only because there is One who can forgive.

Sin is an offence against God and can be forgiven only by the Heavenly Father Himself, or by one to whom the Father has given authority.

John delivered a message that came from heaven —the message of forgiveness that follows repentance, and he also foretold the coming of One whom God had endowed with power to forgive sins.

But John did not presume to exercise this power himself. He was merely the spokesman of the Almighty and the forerunner of One who was mightier than himself—*"the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose."*

And we can borrow courage, too, from John the Baptist's boldness; we can improve our diction by imitating his directness, and we can follow him in the consecration of every energy to God's service.

But the outstanding lesson for us is that we, too, can make straight paths for those who would seek the salvation of God.

We can testify to the supreme importance of the worship of the Heavenly Father; we can show the

simplicity of divine truth and the power of faith to open to us the way to God.

We can warn against the many paths that lead one away from the Father's house and away from the cross.

The Satisfaction of Service.

We can show that Christ's philosophy is a cheerful creed because it teaches the fullness of life and the satisfaction of service.

We can expose the falsehoods of those who boast of breadth and liberality while they exclude from consideration the largest elements in life.

An architect would become an object of ridicule if in planning a house he were careful of the foundation and the walls but knew not how to build a roof. So with the materialist who studies the body and explores the mind but is indifferent to spiritual values—the divine side of life.

The world never needed men like John the Baptist more than it needs them now. It is full of shams and frauds and deceptions; God is mocked, the Bible is derided, and Christ is reduced by some to the stature of a man.

In spite of our intellectual progress and our boasted civilization we are continually compelled to design new laws to protect society from new forms of brutality and crime. Pure food laws are necessary to keep men from poisoning their customers; anti-option laws are necessary to keep gamblers from robbing the producers of wealth; and white-slave laws are necessary to keep women from being

stolen from their homes and dragged down into the underworld—a way-station on the road to a suicide's grave.

There is much of the "wilderness" even in our crowded cities and we need the cry of men with souls afire, calling society back to God, to the Bible and to Christ.

Are our hearts open to calls to service? Are we ready to endure sacrifice in order to win the approval of conscience and the commendation of the Heavenly Father?

V

CHRIST AND HIS FIRST DISCIPLES

JOHN 1:35-51

IN this chapter we come to a consideration of an account of the selection of Christ's first disciples.

It is told by John, who modestly omits his own name: "*Again the next day after John stood, and two of his disciples; and looking upon Jesus as he walked, he saith, Behold, the Lamb of God!*"

This is the third time that John the Baptist testified to the Messiahship of Jesus, and, as far as is known, it is the last time that John looked upon the Saviour in the flesh.

It is proof of the sincerity of John the Baptist, and proof also of his earnestness, that his two disciples who heard the exclamation quoted above followed Jesus.

A word as to John's loyalty to Christ: it is a test of a man's character when he yields to a superior successor.

John was a strong personality—a man with a mission. He was unscathing in denunciation and vehement in his call to repentance. He lost his life because he would not modify his moral standard to placate a wicked king.

Because of the intensity of his nature and the depth of his convictions he might have been inclined to magnify his own importance and to resent competition had he been relying on his own judgment or ability, but John was under no delusion as to his mission. He knew that he was not the expected Messiah, but only the messenger sent to prepare the way—"*A voice crying in the wilderness.*"

"*What Seek Ye?*"

When Jesus noticed that John's disciples were following Him, He asked, "*What seek ye?*" They responded with a very natural explanation; if they were to be His followers, what could be more important than that they should know His abode? He took them home with Him, as we would say, and they remained with Him that day.

It would be interesting to know the subject of conversation at this first conference between the Master and the two pupils who were to play so important a part in the work which Christ came to accomplish. We may be sure that Jesus impressed them deeply as He communed with them in His quiet way, for as a result of the conference Andrew brought his brother Simon and John his brother James to be disciples.

Here we have the first four—two of whom, Peter and John, stand out as the foremost of the twelve. James, too, was very close to the great Teacher; Andrew does not play so conspicuous a part, but it was enough that he brought his brother,

Simon, afterward called Peter, within the charmed circle of Christ's immediate followers.

It will be noticed that Andrew and John began their missionary work at home—the proper place to begin. One should find it easiest to approach those nearest to him, if his life is consistent with his profession. It is natural, too, that Andrew and John, having found the Messiah for whom Israel waited, should want to share the good news with their own kin.

Simple Beginnings.

How simple are the beginnings of great things!

John the Baptist saw Jesus passing and exclaimed: "*Behold, the Lamb of God!*"

Two of his disciples heard this extraordinary tribute paid to Jesus and followed Him.

One of these became "the beloved disciple" and the author of a larger part of the New Testament than any other of the twelve chosen followers.

The other, Andrew, hastened to summon his brother Simon, saying, "*We have found the Messiah.*" Christ at once recognised the possibilities in Peter and changed his name to Cephas, or Peter, meaning "rock," and Peter became the chief of the apostles.

When we see the mighty results that followed the chance meeting of John the Baptist with Andrew and John and the chance passing of Jesus just at that time, we are led to ask: "Was it chance at all?"

Is there not evidence of an interlocking of inci-

dents and of an entwining of events that suggests, if it does not prove, careful pre-arrangement?

If God so loved the world that He sent His only begotten Son to die for man's sins, would He not be sufficiently interested in the disciples of the Son to bring together those best fitted for the great task imposed upon them?

God ever keeps watch above His own and brings to pass the things that are necessary to the unfolding of His plans.

The Fullness of Time.

"The fullness of time" is a phrase frequently used in the Bible. It denotes a purpose in history; when the time is ripe for any great event (and why not equally so for the smaller events?) the stage is set and the actors appear and perform their parts as accurately as if all were the result of many rehearsals.

The story is told briefly and simply as if made up of everyday occurrences. A prophet emerges from obscurity and calls for repentance, foretelling the early coming of the promised Messiah; a Babe is born in Bethlehem and its coming is heralded by angels and celebrated by wise men. As the inn was crowded, the child was cradled in a manger. Two incidents are recorded of His babyhood and one of His boyhood. Next, He appears before the prophet-evangelist to be baptized; then the temptations, and now the selecting of His disciples. The selections seem to have been made casually, the first and second becoming followers at the suggestion of

John the Baptist when Jesus happened to pass by; then these two bring their brothers to Christ and three of these four enter the inner circle of Christ's earthly companions.

How natural it all seems, and yet this brief narrative is the basis on which the world's redemption rests and this unostentatious young man leaves the carpenter's bench to save mankind by His blood and to lead all nations by His heavenly wisdom.

"Come and See."

Jesus found the fifth disciple as He set forth into Galilee; his name was Philip, and he accepted Christ's invitation, *"Follow Me."* He was from Bethsaïda, the home of Andrew and Peter. Thus one small city supplied three of the first five disciples selected.

"Philip findeth Nathanael," communicating to him the discovery that had been made, viz., the finding of the Messiah of whom Moses in the law and the prophets had written.

When the name of Jesus was spoken, Nathanael protested, *"Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?"* he asked. Philip said unto him, *"Come and see."*

The next verse of the narrative gives us the first evidence that Jesus could look within and search the heart. As Nathanael approached, Jesus greeted him with a very complimentary salutation: *"Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!"*

When Nathanael expressed surprise, Jesus an-

swered, *"Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee."*

This power to read his thoughts so impressed Nathanael that he at once became a worshipper, exclaiming, *"Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; Thou art the King of Israel."*

Jesus had already astonished Nathanael, but He had a greater surprise in store for him. Nathanael had believed in Christ because the Saviour recognised him before Philip had invited him to join their company, but he was to see greater things than this; he was to see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Saviour.

The Son of Man.

It will be noticed, here, that three titles are used in referring to Jesus. Philip called Him the son of Joseph, the name by which He was known among the Jews; Nathanael called Him the Son of God; and Christ called Himself the Son of man. The last was a title which Christ at times used, but it cannot be cited to controvert Christ's claim to divine origin.

In the verse in which the phrase is used (v. 51) Christ refers to His supernatural character—the angels of God were to ascend and descend upon Him. He had already heard the loving words of His Heavenly Father in benediction upon Him when He was baptised of John. Even at the age of twelve He had asserted His divine parentage—He must be about His Father's business. He claimed

to be equal with God and to have existed before Abraham.

How little do we mortals know of the future—"one step enough for me."

Little movements start in the same way as big movements. Some one is born, usually unnoticed save by the mother and the members of the family. Then comes the training; an innumerable series of events, seemingly unconnected, prepare the youth for a great opportunity.

God's Servants.

Finally, in the "fullness of time," opportunity comes and finds the hero waiting; he steps forward and proclaims his mission—just the message for which the world was ready. Then the Ruler of the Universe sounds forth "the trumpet that shall never call retreat."

There is but one plan of salvation and but one Christ. But every day in every nation God has work to be done and needs servants who are willing to speak for Him, to act for Him; and, if necessary, to die for Him.

VI

CHRIST AMONGST HIS FRIENDS AT CANA

John 2: 1-11

THE first miracle performed by Jesus "in Cana of Galilee" teaches many lessons and has been subjected to a number of drastically differing interpretations.

The outstanding fact is that on His human side the Master entered fully into the social life of His time.

While He was always about His "Father's business," He recognized that His Father is interested in every phase of life and has a part in all that is necessary to man's happiness and welfare.

Marriage being an ordinance of God, and indispensable to the continuation of the human race, Jesus quite naturally accepted the invitation extended, and attended the wedding at Cana.

The fact that He did attend and there performed His first miracle is cited as proof that His blessing rests upon this sacred relationship. The family is the nursery of the Church, and the most important unit of society.

Several facts suggest, though they do not prove,

that the marriage took place at the home of a relative or intimate friend. The invitation included His disciples, then six in number; that would indicate that Christ was not a casual acquaintance. His mother's conduct, both in interesting herself in the supply of wine and in giving directions to servants, shows familiarity with the household.

An Embarrassing Situation.

It was she who reported the embarrassing situation to her son. Her language revealed more than curiosity—at least, the answer of Jesus shows that He interpreted it as a request that He supply the wine. As the quantity (from one hundred to one hundred and fifty gallons) was too great to be obtained from ordinary sources, she must have had in mind the working of a miracle. She had confidence in His supernatural power, knowing, as she did, the exercise of supernatural power at His birth.

Christ's reply, *"Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come,"* may have been a warning against future attempts to decide when He should put forth His omnipotent arm.

Mary was His mother and had a mother's pride in, as well as a mother's fondness for, her Son. She was not restrained, as Jesus was, by the question of timeliness.

He was not at liberty to experiment; He had refused to turn stones into bread and to cast Himself down from the pinnacle of the Temple. Mary probably knew this, but saw in the help-

ing of others a stronger reason for performing a miracle than He had when He alone would be benefited.

Some have criticised Christ's language, but such criticism indicates unfriendliness on the part of the critic.

Tests of Friendship.

There are many tests of friendship. One of the surest is that a friend never criticises until he has investigated. If an enemy is reported as doing wrong, the natural response is, "I am not surprised," or "I expected it." How different if a friend is accused! "Impossible!" one exclaims. "It cannot be true!" "I must wait until I have heard his version. The man is my friend. I must hear his side."

In this case we have not heard Christ's side. It is difficult to harmonize the imperative demands of a transcendent mission with the ordinary routine of a home—as difficult as it would be for a finite mind like His mother's to lay out work for the Son of God.

But Jesus complied with the mother's suggestion. And the quality of the "*water that was made wine*" was testified to by the ruler of the feast in strong language.

Simplicity of the Miracle.

This first miracle performed by Christ had all the mysteries of a miracle and all the simplicity of the miracle also.

Nature turns water into wine every year—millions of gallons of it—but Nature requires more machinery for her work. She must have grapevines of a certain age, and sunshine and rain—and months.

Nature cannot be hurried, but give her time and the water which the grapevine mysteriously draws from the ground will gather certain additions in transit and then the wine press will separate the water, flavoured and fragrant, from the husks, so to speak, and you have the unfermented juice of the grape.

Give Nature a little more time and she will transmute a harmless and wholesome beverage into an alcoholic poison.

Nature is God's chemical laboratory, but He can work outside of His laboratory as well as inside.

He has not transferred to Nature the right to create—not even the exclusive right to change.

If Nature is empowered by Him to do certain things in certain ways, He does not surrender His right to do anything He pleases in any way He likes. He can do instantly what Nature can do slowly, and also what Nature cannot do at all.

What Sacrilege!

This miracle is unique in one respect: its authenticity is admitted by some who deny that any other miracle was ever performed.

It is interesting to note with what avidity the champions of the liquor interests seize upon the

miracle at Cana to bolster up their fight against prohibition. What sacrilege to associate the tender and loving Saviour with the distiller, the brewer and the liquor dealer!

When Christ said, "*Suffer little children to come unto me and forbid them not,*" He had no such fate in store for them as the liquor seller had when he lured them into his den of vice and immorality. No greater indignity has ever been offered to the Great Teacher than is offered by the effort to represent Him as the friend and defender of an outlawed traffic.

Some have questioned whether the wine described in the text was fermented or not. It is entirely possible that it may have been unfermented, as was the wine which is mentioned in the butler's dream which Joseph interpreted. It will be remembered that the butler dreamed that he "*pressed the grapes into Pharaoh's cup.*" There was certainly no time for fermentation in that case.

An Entirely New Method.

But it is not necessary for the defense of prohibition to believe that the wine made from the water was unfermented and therefore non-intoxicating.

Prohibition is a modern method of dealing with the liquor question. The use of wine was an ancient custom; the Bible tells us that Noah planted a vineyard and drank of the wine thereof and was drunken.

Ahasuerus was merry with wine when Queen Vashti refused to obey his command to appear

before a lot of drunken revellers—a disobedience which cost her her crown. Achilles, in his famous quarrel with Agamemnon over Helen, called his fellow-warrior a winebibber.

Total abstinence, while not unknown in the earlier days, very much increased during the last century. There were, in the Old Testament times, total abstainers, like the Nazarites and Daniel, but not to drink was the exception rather than the rule. Demosthenes was a teetotaler, as we learn from his speech on *The Embassy,* and was criticized for not drinking, but few orators followed his example until recent years.

The Saloon Was a Bureau of Crime.

It must also be remembered that the drinking place which prohibition exterminated was quite different from the ancient drinking place, or even the European drinking place at the present time. Other bar-rooms were bad enough, but the American saloon was, in some respects, more demoralizing than any other; it was a bureau of information on crime.

Then, too, we have the benefit of education now, as to the effects of alcohol on the system; the people of former times had no such fund of information.

But, had the situation then been exactly the same as now, there is no reason why the miracle of Cana should be regarded as inconsistent with that which is now done in the name of Christianity.

Christ did not attempt to change the customs of His day by applying His principles to evils that

existed, but He gave the world a moral code that has gradually wrought great changes and is destined to cleanse the world of all wrong-doing.

He dealt, not with symptoms, but with the root of the disease; instead of poulticing a few boils, He purified the blood; instead of correcting habits, He cleansed the heart, out of which are the issues of life, and removed the desire for sinful things. He announced fundamental principles and left man to apply them; He sowed the seed and left man to tend the crop and harvest it when ripe.

Christ's All-Embracing Method.

To illustrate His method: He did not abolish imprisonment for debt, common in His day, but He gave us the Gospel that has opened the prison doors throughout the civilized world and put an end to this form of punishment.

He did not propose a bankruptcy law, but His words, embodied in statutes, have brought the second chance to honest men who have legitimately failed.

Innumerable illustrations will occur to the reader; in fact, every great moral reform accomplished in a thousand years has been built upon His teachings, and all the important reforms of the future will be inspired by His thought.

Prohibition is the greatest moral reform ever won at the American polls, and is in entire accord with all that Jesus taught.

We can better entrust the interpretation of Christ's teachings to disinterested, churchgoing

Christians than to those who, for the money to be made out of the business, conspire against the safety of the individual, the sanctity of the home, and the purity of politics.

No Christian need fear the First Miracle; those who try to use it to defend liquor are the very people who would, for pecuniary gain, use the pardon of a sinful woman as an excuse for immorality.

VII

CHRIST AND NICODEMUS

John 3:1-17

THE first half of the third chapter of John's Gospel is so pregnant with tremendous truths that in attempting to study it, one hardly knows where to begin, what to emphasize most, or how to conclude.

The Master talks with Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. He came to Jesus by night—not a very courageous thing for him to do, and yet it was better than not to come at all.

His prominence is proof of his intelligence and what he says is, therefore, of weight, especially when it is remembered that the leaders among the Jewish people were very bitter in their opposition to Christ.

Nicodemus recognized in Christ some one greater than the ordinary man. "*We know that Thou art a teacher come from God,*" he says—a reason that was convincing from his own point of view—"*for no man can do these miracles that Thou doest, except God be with him.*"

Christ paid Nicodemus a high compliment when He revealed to him the central truth of the Christian religion. Here was an intelligent man, one of

the opposition and yet open-minded; he was sufficiently impressed to admit Christ's superiority over other teachers, giving as a reason an admitted fact—the performing of miracles—and drawing from the acts of Christ a conclusion that was entirely justified.

The Saviour now takes him into His confidence and proclaims the necessity for a new birth. "*Except a man be born again,*" says Jesus, "*he cannot see the kingdom of God.*"

How one can be born again was a mystery to Nicodemus, as it has been a mystery to millions since that day—and for the same reason. Nicodemus had not learned to distinguish between the physical and the spiritual world.

He was still a materialist, although evidently in search of light. He put to Christ the materialist's question—How can this be? And to it the Saviour answered: "*Except a man be born of water and of the spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.*"

Two Worlds Defined.

Here we have the two worlds defined and the distinction seems clear enough, and yet it is ignored by many throughout the world who are as intelligent as Nicodemus.

These two worlds exist side by side; their inhabitants mingle daily, and yet the inhabitants of each are unable to comprehend the inhabitants of the other.

The radio has given us the greatest illustration drawn from Nature in many centuries.

We now know that there are sounds in the air that can be heard by those in tune with the sender, and by him only. With a modern receiver, one can tune in on any wave link he likes, listen to what he pleases and shut out all other sounds.

And so it is in the world of the flesh and the world of the spirit.

There are some who inhabit the physical world and are utterly unconscious of the fact that there is a higher world. They even scoff at those who are in "tune with the infinite." Knowing only the pleasures that come through the flesh, they mock at those whom they call visionary.

These worshippers of the god of Ease, eat and drink and die; and they call this "life." What others spend in altruistic ways—to their own delight and for the benefit of society—the sensualists lavish upon themselves. And they are unconscious of their sin because they know no better—"*Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.*"

No Greater Miracle.

And yet these materialists denounce as narrow-minded those who consider both the soul and the body, as if it were proof of intellectual breadth to exclude the most important part of man—the spiritual element.

It is possible to be born again and to be so changed that the one who undergoes such a change

hates the things he once loved and loves the things he once hated.

There is no greater miracle than this, and it is performed every day all over the world. The healing of lepers, the opening of the eyes of the blind, the restoration of the hearing—even the raising of the dead—is not more marvellous than the cleansing of the human heart.

Christ did this when He was on earth and He is doing it still—and will continue to do it until time shall be no more.

This power that Christ possesses and constantly exercises is conclusive proof that He was more than a man—"*That which is born of the flesh is flesh.*" Christ was the only begotten Son of God; He had and still has, as He claimed, power to forgive sins.

Christ's Compelling Logic.

His exercise, now, of the power to forgive sins is also proof that Christ rose from the dead and lives today, for only the living can do what Christ now does.

With compelling logic, the Saviour pointed out that one who will not believe the earthly things about which He spoke can hardly be expected to believe the heavenly things which He revealed.

Spiritual proof, though different from physical proof, is just as strong and convincing. Gravitation, for instance, is known by its effects. It draws toward the earth elements that are lighter than air.

Every one can understand this; why should it be more difficult to understand spiritual gravitation that draws all souls toward heaven? "*I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me.*"

A balloon rises when the ballast is thrown out, just as the soul rises when its sins are forgiven and it is set free. There is no intellectual bar to salvation; the acceptance of Christ is as easy for the unlettered as for the educated—as easy for the educated as for the unlettered.

There is no property qualification; the poor can accept Christ as well as the rich, and the rich as easily as the poor. Sin can fix no barrier, for Christ is able to save unto the uttermost.

An Important Distinction.

The thirteenth verse of this third chapter of John states an important fact and answers numerous criticisms. Christ declares that "*no one hath ascended up to heaven, but He that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven.*"

Here is the testimony of the Saviour Himself that He had lived with the Father in heaven before He came to earth. This separates Him from all other beings. The difference between Christ and man is not a question of degree, but a question of kind. We human beings are separated from Christ by that infinite gulf that measures the difference between man and God.

It will be noticed that Christ, in describing Himself, uses a phrase which He often used, namely,

"the Son of man," but it is evident that He does not intend to identify Himself with man born of man, because in the same sentence He declares that He abode with the Father before He became incarnate in the flesh, and at other times He prophesied His death and resurrection.

One of the Greatest Verses of the Bible.

The sixteenth verse is one of the most comforting as well as one of the most inspiring of all the verses of the Bible: *"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."*

Here we have the love of God given as the reason for Christ's appearance among men; we have Christ put in a class by Himself—*"His only begotten Son";* we have the prerequisite to salvation—*"Whosoever believeth in Him";* and we have the promise of eternal life.

What a wonderful sentence! Where else can we find so much that is vital to man compressed into the same number of words!

"For God so loved the world"—this is the only message that the evangelists can carry to the world!

The Christian religion is built on God's love; it wins its way by Christ's love and its blessedness is demonstrated as man, catching the spirit of the Father and the spirit of the Son, lives a life of love and thus helps to establish an universal brotherhood.

The seventeenth verse completes the full circle.

God sent His Son into the world, not to condemn the world, although sinful man confesses his unworthiness when he is measured against the perfection of Christ.

God did not send His Son into the world to judge man, although Christ's example is, in itself, a judgment against those who do not strive to imitate Him.

God sent His Son into the world "*that the world through Him might be saved.*"

Who but the Almighty and His Son could have proposed such a plan of salvation?

Even if man were presumptuous enough to advance such a plan, no human imagination could have suggested it, and yet this is the plan, not formulated by a school of philosophy, not constructed by a group of scientists, not elaborated by an assembly of educators, but proclaimed by one whom John described as unlettered—a Galilæan peasant, reared in a carpenter shop.

Unreasonable Reason.

The rationalists ask us to believe that just a mere man, born nearly two thousand years ago amid the most unfavourable surroundings (if we exclude the supernatural) entertained the delusion that he was the only begotten Son of God, set up a kingdom of his own on earth and willingly sealed with his death the testimony of his life—that such an one established the Christian religion and so impressed succeeding generations that thousands of

millions have taken His Name upon their lips and millions have been willing to die rather than surrender their faith in Him.

How can reason be so unreasonable? How can Christ be explained except as the Bible explains Him?

If Nicodemus had lived today, his scepticism would have been far less excusable even than it was when he "*came to Jesus by night.*"

VIII

CHRIST AND THE SAMARITAN WOMAN

JOHN 4:7-14, 24-26, 31-35

THE human characters portrayed in the Bible may be divided into two classes, viz.: those who give light and those who are brought into prominence by the light of others.

In the Old Testament, for instance, Elijah's light shines on Ahab, and a wicked king and his still more wicked wife are given a place in history because they are exposed in the act of violating four of the Ten Commandments to get a little piece of land.

Elisha shines on Naaman and, behold, a Syrian leper is immortalized because he was cured by the prophet.

In the New Testament, the Brightest of all Lights draws from obscurity into enduring fame a long line of men and women who become conspicuous because, and only because, of the lessons taught through them.

Nicodemus, a learned man and a ruler, about whom our last chapter revolved, walked into the limelight of history when, calling upon the Saviour in the night time, he became the agent through whom Christ announced a basic truth—the neces-

sity of a new birth—and proclaimed the boundless love of the Heavenly Father.

In the passage we are to consider in this chapter, we see a Samaritan widow, living in a domestic relationship forbidden then and now, emerge from the darkness long enough to teach others lessons of incalculable value.

The Art of the Sacred Narrative.

If the Bible were nothing more than a book of fiction, it would surpass all other books of that kind in the consummate art with which its many characters are introduced. But truth, at all times, is not only stranger than fiction, but far more thrilling. Note, then, how easily, even casually, the Woman of Samaria comes upon the scene.

The disciples go to a nearby city to buy meat, and Jesus, being weary, sits down by a well to rest. How natural the action of the disciples and the action of the Saviour; and how natural also that a Samaritan woman should come to the well—that particular well at Sychar—for water, as a host of Samaritan women did every day.

And how natural that she should express surprise that a Jew would ask even a cup of water of a Samaritan. Let us follow, then, the wonderful lessons so simply told in this fourth chapter of John.

Jesus uses the physical to explain the spiritual; witness the use of natural water which quenches thirst only for a little while, to make known the

priceless value of that which is as "*a well of water springing up into everlasting life.*"

A spring is one of the most fascinating facts in Nature; and a living well is merely a spring with an artificial outlet. A spring is the best illustration of a Christian life, just as a stagnant pool is the most striking illustration of a selfish life.

The pool receives the water that flows down into it from the sloping ground around, and gives forth nothing in return; the spring gives forth constantly of that which is refreshing and invigorating and asks nothing in return.

The pool and the spring illustrate the vast and vital difference between selfishness and service. But why is a spring a spring? Because it is connected with a source that is higher than itself.

A Tremendous Fact.

A spring is simply the outlet of a reservoir above. Christ revealed to the woman a fact of tremendous importance, namely, that He can bring a frail human being—even the vilest of sinners—into such vital contact and continuing relationship with the Heavenly Father that the goodness of God can flow out to the world through the regenerated individual.

If we measure a human being in units of horse-power, we find that he is not relatively as strong as some of the animals; if we measure him in units of intellectual power, we soon reach his limitations. But when we measure him in units of spiritual power we cannot estimate his possibilities. One

human heart full of love to God and man may overflow with blessings which may reach a community, a state, a nation or a world.

We have here, too (verse 24), another truth of the first magnitude—that "*God is a spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.*"

As we have frequently asked in the presence of similar evidences of wisdom, so we ask again, where could a mere Galilæan peasant acquire the knowledge of spiritual things such as flowed from Jesus in a constant, life-giving stream?

Two Lines of Reasoning.

Christ not only described the Creator as invisible, as well as eternal, but He furnished the logic used by those who reason from God down instead of from inanimate matter up.

There are but two lines of reasoning in regard to the Creation; the theist reasons from God, all wise, all loving, and all powerful, down to the things that are finite. The atheist reasons from inanimate matter and inanimate force up. Which is the more reasonable?

There *must* be a starting point to reason from, and yet reason furnishes no information as to the "*in the Beginning.*" A distinguished agnostic, near the close of his life, declared that "the beginning of all things is a mystery insoluble by us."

But revelation is able to do that which is beyond the power of reason; revelation, and revelation only, discloses a beginning, and the only beginning

of which man has any knowledge. Jesus, described by the beloved disciple as unlettered, announced the supremacy of the spiritual, and all the learned atheists and agnostics have not been able to answer His argument.

A Puzzling Reply.

The disciples who had returned during Christ's conversation with the Samaritan woman, knowing that the human side of Him was in need of food, begged Him to eat. He replied, "*I have meat to eat that ye know not of,*" which, as He explained to His astonished companions, means, "*My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me, and to finish His work.*"

Here again Christ contrasts the spiritual with the physical. As God is a Spirit, so man, made in God's image, has a spiritual nature, which must dominate man's life if that life is to be worth while.

To think only of the meat that nourishes the body is to live on a low plane; to think first of God's will and of God's work is to live on the highest plane to which man can aspire.

Here we have a number of sublime truths lifted up and made visible to all the world and for all time, as the result of a seemingly accidental conversation with a sinful woman of Samaria. No novelist could invent the story—no writer of fiction would dare to introduce truth in such a way.

The questions put to Jesus by this woman also brought out an announcement of His Messiahship.

"I know that Messiah cometh, which is called Christ," she said; *"when He is come, He will tell us all things. Jesus sayeth unto her, I that speak unto thee am He."*

Was He an impostor? He was if He did not really believe Himself to be the Messiah. But no impostor could have impersonated the Messiah, even if he had been foolhardy enough to attempt it.

Was Jesus deluded? Could one acting under a delusion have said what He said, have done what He did, or have been what He was? It was a revelation of Himself; He was what He claimed to be.

Impostors are numerous and not a few are deluded, but no impostor has been able to practice imposition long; and those who are themselves deluded do not deceive others. The Jews had been waiting for a Messiah for hundreds of years. Christ answered the description given in advance and fulfilled the prophecies spoken of Him. No one else had done so, and no one has done so in all the succeeding centuries.

Christ's Universality.

Even the most learned have never been able to lift themselves into the same class with Christ as teachers. They may fit into an age or into the thought of a race or of a locality for awhile, but no one except Christ has been both universal and eternal. Why is this so if He were just a man, whether an impostor, a deluded visionary, or even an honest imitator?

A word concerning that last great word of Christ in this passage, verse thirty-five. "*Lift up your eyes and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest.*" The harvest is ripe now, as in the days when Christ was among men. Every day, everywhere the "*fields are white already to harvest,*" and yet men rush to and fro in a frantic search for peace, when the Prince of Peace stands at their door ready to succour all.

People of means seek out inviting resorts and secluded retreats in search of rest, ignoring the great Physician whose touch is more healing than the surf, or the breezes that woo the weary to mountain or sea. His is the only yoke that is easy; His is the only burden that is light.

IX

CHRIST AND THE NOBLEMAN'S SON

JOHN 4:46-54

SUFFERING levels all ranks of society and runs over all distinctions in human nature. The proud Roman centurion mentioned in the fourth chapter of John's Gospel probably would have been unwilling to invite Jesus to dine with him under ordinary circumstances, but when his son was at the point of death, he humbly came to the Saviour as a last resort.

This nobleman lived at Capernaum, then a seaport of prominence—now only a jumble of ruins. When Mrs. Bryan and I visited the Holy Land, some years ago, we went by boat from Tiberias to the site of Capernaum. On the way we were twice compelled to lower the sails because of sudden gusts of wind, like those described in the New Testament.

We anchored near where Capernaum once stood, and ate our lunch on the seashore. Our son had caught a few fish, and I had purchased from a shepherd a lamb—one of the long-tail breed which Rawlinson describes in his *Ancient History*. These, with the bread we carried with us, furnished food for our party. Then I gathered

a quantity of pebbles to give out as souvenirs of our visit to this historic spot. But, pardon this digression!

"Thy Son Liveth."

The centurion's insistence called forth a rebuke from the Master: *"Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe."* The Roman ignored the rebuke and still pleaded for Jesus to go to his son's relief. Moved by the father's earnestness, Christ said: *"Go thy way; thy son liveth."*

As the nobleman returned to his home, full of faith in his son's recovery, he met messengers who informed him that his son had commenced to improve at the very hour that the words of encouragement were spoken. The faith of the centurion was stimulated by what he had heard of Christ's power to heal, and it was perfected by the words and manner of the Saviour.

"Absent" treatment was as easy for Christ as treatment performed in His presence. God is everywhere, and therefore equally near to all His children. The *radii* from His throne reach every human being—

". . . we cannot drift
Beyond His love and care."

The Creator holds the solar systems in His hand, and yet, while He swings through space the most distant stars, keeping them in the orbits that He has fixed for them, He watches over each one of His children as if each child were His only care;

even a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without His notice.

Now that we know that the human voice can be carried through the thickest masonry and around the earth without the aid of wires—even to the most distant planets for all that we know—how can we doubt that an omnipotent God is within speaking distance of all His people?

And how can we doubt the willingness of an all-loving Heavenly Father to give us, in His own way and in His own good time, that which is best for us?

The effect of the healing of the nobleman's son deserves notice. He believed. The miracle is an unanswerable argument—hence the violent attacks made upon it by materialists.

The miracle conclusively proves the supernatural; an event is a miracle, because it *is* supernatural. If man could, of his own strength, perform a miracle, it would not be a miracle at all; hence the awe that a miracle excites and the change of heart that it produces in those who accept it as true.

The Curing of Sin.

Medical missionaries have wrought a great work, first by doing what heathen physicians cannot do, and then by making the beneficiaries of the physician's skill understand that medical missionaries are but finite, human imitations of the Great Physician whose example they follow and by whose spirit they are actuated.

But why should the healing of the body be so convincing while the forgiveness of sin often passes unnoticed?

No physical pain is as racking as remorse; and Christ can cure remorse by forgiving sin and prompting the pardoned sinner to the making of reparation for wrong done, as easily as, when in the days of His flesh, he allayed physical pain.

The wasting of a lung is not so serious a disease as the wasting of a life. Why, then, should the restoring of a lung be regarded as more miraculous than the filling of a life with a passion for service?

Hardening of the arteries is not so great an affliction as hardening of the heart. Why, then, is the curing of the former considered a greater miracle than the curing of the latter?

The healing of any bodily disease benefits one for a few years at most, while the soul is saved for eternity; the restoring of the body therefore is a gift of but little worth compared with the priceless value of spiritual gifts. Yet with many people today, as with most people who lived nineteen hundred years ago, thought is centered on the body rather than on the soul.

Christ for All and Forever.

In the case we are considering, it was a centurion's son that was healed. But Jesus is just as willing to minister to the spiritual needs of a common soldier as to the needs of an officer; He is just as willing to cure the peasant's son as the noble-

man's son—the needs of the employee appeal to Him as much as the needs of the employer.

The Saviour's call is to everyone everywhere—Christ for all and forever.

Ideal Family Life.

I cannot conclude this study without a word of comment on the last four words of the fifty-third verse of this passage: "*And himself believed, and his whole house.*"

In the matter of religion the children usually follow the parents; why not? They must follow some one; they cannot decide such things for themselves until they have passed the age when the formation of character begins.

The natural thing is for the parents to lead the children into the Church; it is difficult to over-estimate the silent influence for good exerted by parents over children in matters of religion. And it is as difficult to over-estimate the harmful influence exerted by parents who are indifferent to religion themselves.

An outsider is greatly handicapped when he endeavours to counteract in a few minutes on Sunday the prejudice against religion acquired through all the waking hours of the week from parents who either openly assail religion or quietly ignore it in the household, and yet there are very many instances that recall the words of the ancient prophet, "*A little child shall lead them.*"

An atheist-father, whose little daughter had been brought into the Sunday-school once wrote on the

child's blackboard the words, "God is nowhere," and asked his daughter to read the words aloud. "God is *now here*," she read, and her rendition of the sentence was the means of bringing her father into the fold of the Good Shepherd.

Who is to guide the child during its tender years if not the parents? Normally, the father and mother are more interested in their children than outsiders can possibly be, and the children usually have more confidence in their parents than in others.

A Deceptive Argument.

Sometimes we hear advanced the complacent theory that children should not, during their youth, be biassed by the teaching of any religious doctrine or system—that the child should be left absolutely free to decide religious questions for itself on reaching maturity. Those who argue thus are either deceived themselves or they are trying to deceive others.

No boy or girl can grow to maturity in a Christian community without becoming either a worshipper of God or an unbeliever. And the same is true in regard to a child's attitude toward Christ; long before maturity is reached a child accepts Christ or rejects Him.

If the world is to be won for Christ, the family as a whole must be saved, whether the parents lead the children or, as sometimes happens, the children lead the parents.

X

CHRIST AND HIS OWN TOWNSFOLK

LUKE 4: 16-30

THE Scripture to be read in connection with this chapter invites reminiscence. "*And He came to Nazareth where He had been brought up.*"

Smith, in his comment on the boyhood of Jesus, points out that Nazareth stood on the great highway between Persia and Egypt, over which the rich commerce between these far-famed ancient nations passed. Of it, the late T. DeWitt Talmage said:

"This town is beautifully situated in a great green bowl, the sides of the bowl being the surrounding hills. The God of nature who is the God of the Bible evidently scooped out this valley for privacy and separation from all the world during the three most important decades, the thirty years of Christ's boyhood and youth.

"I do not believe there was one of the surrounding fifteen hills that the boy Christ did not range from bottom to top, or one cavern in their sides He did not explore, or one species of birds flying across the tops that He could not call by name, or one of all the species of fauna browsing on those steeps that He had not recognized."

"And, as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day." Note the words—*"as His custom was."*

Jesus was brought up to observe the Sabbath and continued to attend synagogue worship regularly after He was old enough to mark out His own course. Who is to blame for the fact that children are not trained to regular church-attendance as they were formerly, in both Jewish and Gentile families?

If it be the fault of the children, what has changed their attitude towards the Church? Are the parents less religious than in former generations? If so, why? Have business, society and pleasure crowded religion into the background?

Business is necessary—a man's physical needs must be satisfied; but they are no greater than they were nineteen hundred years ago, and his spiritual needs are not less.

Pleasures are as necessary as formerly, but the necessity is no greater and they are as impotent as in the past to satisfy man's longing for higher things.

No Possible Substitute.

Society is also a necessity, and yet universal experience proves that man cannot get along with society alone.

Business, pleasure and society—each can supply a part of man's need, but neither or all combined can furnish a substitute for religion—"the relation between man and his Maker."

Even education cannot take the place of reverence for God. Man is by nature a worshipper; if he surrenders belief in God, he worships man, the next thing below God—and that man is usually himself.

Are parents giving up faith in God and becoming mind-worshippers? Something is wrong somewhere, and it behooves us to root out the cause as speedily as possible and remove it.

If the world's greatest need is to get back to God, its second great need is to get back to reverence for God's Word and for God's House.

It was the custom of Jesus to attend worship wherever He happened to be; if we follow in His footsteps, we will be found in His House when we are at summer resorts or at winter retreats, or wherever we may be, whether on business or pleasure bent.

Jesus Reads the Lesson.

Christ could scarcely have failed to attend the synagogue on His return to His early home. He was by this time so well known because of His teachings and miracles that He was invited to read the second lesson. According to custom, the first lesson was taken from the law and the second from the prophets.

The scroll of *The Book of Isaiah* was given to Him and He turned to the following passage: *"The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He hath anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He hath sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to*

preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord."

Having finished reading, He gave the book back to the minister and proceeded to declare Himself the Messiah whose coming was foretold in the passage He had just read: "*This day,*" He said, "*is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears.*"

An Astonished Congregation.

It was a wonderful vision that the ancient seer had of the beatitudes to be realized in a far distant day, and it was a bold utterance Jesus made when He declared Himself the divine agent through whom these blessings were to be brought to man.

His hearers were astonished "*at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth.*" They had known Him only as a man—as Joseph's son—and could not understand His claim to the Messiahship.

Answering their manner rather than their words, He gave utterance to a bit of philosophy now current throughout the world: "*No prophet is accepted in his own country.*"

It is hard to overcome the levelling effect of casual acquaintance. A great man's neighbour's seldom put him on a pedestal until after he dies. Gigantic characters, like mountains, impress us most when viewed from a distance. The disciples who came into intimate fellowship with Christ revered Him more than those who knew Him only

by the reports in circulation as to the wonders performed by Him, but even the disciples, as we learn later, could not comprehend all that He was and was to be.

Christ's Majestic Bearing.

Jesus then proceeded to give His astonished hearers two illustrations, drawn from the Old Testament, of miracles performed for those outside the Jewish race; viz., the widow of Sarepta, unto whom Elijah was sent; and Naaman, whom Elisha healed. This angered His hearers still the more, and they sought to kill Him.

The Jews have always been regarded as an excitable people, changing quickly from ecstacy to execration, but they have no monopoly on fickleness, as anyone can testify who has attended a national political Convention. It is a human rather than a race characteristic.

A Gospel for the Poor.

The first to be benefitted by His Messiahship were the poor; they were always on His heart. He was raised among them and knew their needs; His Gospel is the only hope of the poor today; it is justice mixed with mercy.

The helplessness of the poor appealed to Him; He frequently showed His compassion. He used Lazarus, whose poverty was aggravated by sores, to rebuke the indifference of Dives.

In the passage He read, the captives were to be released; here again He was to minister to the

sufferers. He was also to open the eyes of the blind—affliction still appealing to Him, and the same thought is repeated in the next line.

"*But He, passing through the midst of them, went His way.*" Here we have another evidence of His majestic presence. He did not disappear; He was not rescued by a miracle—"*He passed through the midst of them and went His way.*"

It was the same awe-inspiring bearing that saved Him from attack when He drove the money-changers out of the Temple.

It is well to remember that He who is to save the world by His blood and guide the world by His example was not a weakling, nor of a retiring disposition.

He preached the Gospel of peace and was the personification of it, but He had the highest of all forms of courage—the courage to sacrifice and to suffer for righteousness' sake.

The Greater Courage.

It requires more courage to be a follower of Christ—to be true when others deny Him and to stand unawed when others flee—than it does to follow any human teacher or to apply any human philosophy.

History has turned on those who were steadfast—on the martyrs who would rather die than recant. It is not those who are willing to kill, but those who are willing to be killed who do most to vindicate the power of truth.

Civilization is but a succession of reforms, each

originating in the courage of some one individual, and all important reforms are in harmony with the teachings of the Man of Galilee. Back of each truth there are forces as constant and as irresistible as those that develop the ripened harvest from seed sown in fertile soil.

"*Consider the lilies, how they grow.*" This is the language of the Saviour, and in these six words He tells us something more important than we can find in any book that discusses merely the processes through which plants pass. Science may explain the methods, but Jesus states the law—"they grow."

Why Truth Grows.

So history describes the rising and fall of empires, and the changing of national boundary lines, but Christ states the law. Truth grows for the same reason that the lilies grow, because Truth, like the lilies, has God back of it; He keeps "watch above His own."

The truth that Jesus scattered, as He preached in Nazareth, about the shores of the Sea of Galilee and at other places visited, has grown and grown and grown until it is becoming the inspiration of all lands. Pilgrims go in multitudes to the Holy Land that they may look upon the places where Jesus walked during His brief sojourn among men; and one of the most interesting of all the sacred places is the city of Nazareth, "*where He had been brought up.*"

XI

CHRIST AND MATTHEW, THE PUBLICAN

MATTHEW 9:9-13

WHEN Christ picked out a publican for a disciple He knew perfectly well when He did so, that He was selecting a man who belonged to a class that was held in disrepute.

The publicans (or taxgatherers) of that day did not enjoy an enviable reputation; the office offered great opportunities for the corrupt and the greedy and those who accepted it were under the suspicion of the populace. But Christ was able to search the heart and weigh the character. He was willing to trust Matthew and His confidence was justified.

Matthew's Courage.

Matthew left all and followed Christ, and he had more to leave than some of the other disciples. Commentators emphasize the fact that Matthew gave up a lucrative position when he cast in his lot with the Saviour. It required courage, determination and consecration, and Matthew was equal to the demands of the ordeal.

Matthew carried his accuracy as an accountant into his chronicling of the words and deeds of Christ. As some one has said, " He left everything

but his pen and ink," and of these he made most excellent use.

The late Dr. Jowett, that great English divine who preached for several years in the United States, has wisely pointed out that Christ consecrates to higher use the powers of those who become the servants of God. As swords are not destroyed but beaten into plowshares—thus being changed from weapons of destruction into useful tools—so men who hear the call to service take the powers that they have and turn them to the Master's service.

Matthew's name is mentioned but five times in the New Testament, and it is Matthew himself who, in a very few words, relates his call. But a great deal is said in these few words—Christ invited him and he accepted the invitation. In the next chapter, Matthew refers to himself when giving the names of the disciples. Mark mentions him in the same way, as does also Luke, both in his Gospel and in the Book of Acts. Mark and Luke, in telling of his call by Jesus, refer to him as Levi.

The Most Quoted Gospel.

Not a single word spoken by Matthew is recorded in the New Testament. Yet his Gospel is as often quoted as any other of the Gospels—probably more frequently.

It is the only Gospel except Luke's that mentions the birth of the Saviour. Matthew also describes the flight into Egypt and the return, an

incident in the life of Christ nowhere else recorded, and he records the Lord's Prayer in the form most generally used.

Matthew gives more fully than any of the other evangelists the Sermon on the Mount—incomparably the greatest of all religious discourses. This sermon, as recorded by Matthew, presents more completely the moral code of the Great Teacher than any account found elsewhere.

Each of the Beatitudes is a sermon in itself, each has been the basis of countless sermons. They are so full of meaning and so suggestive of illustrations and present-day application that one could preach upon them Sunday after Sunday, month after month, even year after year, without becoming monotonous or repetitious.

It was while reading three passages in Matthew that I was impressed, as I had not been before, with the use that Christ made of the word, "all"—at once one of the smallest and most comprehensive words in our language.

One Little Word.

In the twenty-second chapter Christ announces the first great commandment. It was brought out by a question propounded by a lawyer for the purpose of entrapping the Saviour. When the Pharisees found that other questioners had been discomfitted by the replies made by the Master, one of them, "*a lawyer, asked Him saying, Master, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with*

all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment."

Here we have the word "all" used three times—*all* the heart, *all* the soul, *all* the mind. What other word could Christ have used in this connection?

Any word of limited meaning—any word less comprehensive than the word "all"—would have made this commandment ridiculous. God not only requires a whole-hearted, whole-souled, and whole-minded love, but any less than all would leave a vacuum in heart and soul and mind that would be filled by some opposing force.

There can be no divided allegiance; God must come first—His claims are paramount.

The Overflowing Heart.

And how can a heart overflow unless it be full? How can *anything* overflow unless it be full? There is nothing in a human heart that can be of any great benefit to others; it is only when love of God fills the heart to overflowing that man has something to impart to others.

The second group of "alls" is found in the concluding verses of the last chapter of Matthew.

Christ, after His crucifixion and resurrection, in His last communion with His followers, commissioned them to go out and *"teach all nations,"* and they were to teach *all* that Christ had commanded them. And Christ, with *all* power in His hands—*all* power in heaven and earth—promised to be with them even unto the end of the world.

The word "all" is used here four times, and

no other word of less breadth could be substituted for it.

In the concluding verses of the eleventh chapter of Matthew, we find the wonderful appeal made by Christ to "*all that labour and are heavy laden*"—another "all." The comfort of this appeal would have been chilled if the call had been narrowed by a word implying any limitations.

Sitting with Sinners.

It is impossible to exhaust the riches of the Gospel of Matthew, but we cannot ignore the thought suggested in the verses which immediately follow the calling of Matthew—namely, Christ's communion with publicans and sinners.

It is not necessary to offer excuse for the Saviour's action. The text says that "*many publicans and sinners came and sat down with Him and His disciples in Matthew's house.*" It would not have been courteous for the guest to quarrel with his host about the character of those whom he permitted to enter his house.

And it might have been difficult to classify the publicans and sinners by their appearances—especially the sinners. It would be rather risky today for one to go into a social gathering and attempt to classify men according to the number and magnitude of their sins without intimate acquaintance with the individuals. Sometimes it takes more than acquaintance—sometimes we have to wait for the courts to act before we are sure.

Christ was not afraid to mingle with sinners.

He gave a ready answer to His critics—two answers, in fact, which have passed into common use —*"They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick,"* and, *"I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."*

In the Parable of The Lost Sheep, Christ lays emphasis upon the fact that He came to seek and to save those who had wandered away.

The Christian's Duty.

And is not that also the duty of those who follow in His footsteps? While Christ declared it to be man's first duty to seek the Kingdom of God, He continually pointed out the after-work of His disciples. They were not to sit down and rest; they were to go about doing good. Those who would imitate the Master must find pleasure in rescuing sinners—in carrying Christ's Gospel to those who know it not.

Christ did not fear contamination—no one need fear contamination who has a message to deliver.

To illustrate: it is safe to put the nozzle of a hose in a muddy pool because the hose is connected with a reservoir that is higher than the pool; no mud or filth can enter the hose because the pressure in the hose is greater than the pressure in the pool.

Just so long as a follower of Christ is filled with love of God and is trying to hasten the coming of God's Kingdom by the bringing of souls to Christ, he can go anywhere without danger to his spiritual well-being.

On this very subject, as much as anywhere else,

a change can be noticed in the manner of both the minister and the layman. It is not necessary to be of the world in order to be in the world. On the contrary, it is only by being in the world that Christians can help by example. The Christian is commanded to let his light shine, and a shining light is of no value except to illumine the darkness.

Hidden Virtues.

This study may be applied in many ways by those who study it closely. It shows us, anew, Christ's power to search the heart and to discover the priceless, manly virtues that are sometimes hidden behind a very uninviting exterior. Out of a publican came an inestimable apostle.

And we ought to be able to acquire a quickened sense of the value of the Gospel of Matthew, and of the very practical lesson it teaches,—that of the rendering of service to those who need our help, to the sick and the lost.

The young need guidance that they may be led in the right way and thus avoid the loss of time and the suffering involved in the correction of mistakes that ought not to have been made. And we must be sympathetic towards those who fall by the wayside and need to be helped to their feet or brought back into the paths from which they strayed in moments of weakness.

Matthew exhibits Christ in the rôle of a helper, that rôle which every Christian can and should assume if he is to be a follower of the meek and lowly Jesus.

XII

CHRIST AND THE CHOSEN TWELVE

MATTHEW 10:1-8

IN this chapter we have to do with the commissioning of the Twelve Apostles.

The first verse of our selected Scriptural passage reads: "*And when He had called unto Him His twelve disciples.*" In the next verse they are called apostles: "*Now the names of the twelve apostles are these—*"

They were first followers, then representatives—approved ambassadors.

Commentators call attention to the fact that the twelve are named by Matthew, Mark and Luke in their Gospels, and by Luke in the Acts. In each case Peter is mentioned first, and emphasis is placed upon the fact that they represent different types in temperament, disposition and mental attitudes.

Peter was, by nature, impulsive—now on the hill top and full of enthusiasm—now in the valley—even ready to deny Christ. But the Resurrection transformed him into a rock. John, always named among the first four, who, in the early days of his discipleship was aggressive and vehement, afterward became constant and loving. Nathanael (Bartholomew) was full of faith. Thomas, con-

stituted a doubter, in one memorable incident, declared his belief in his Lord and his God.

Matthew was an official under the Roman government, while Simon, the Canaanite, was a Zealot and in rebellion against constituted authority. Jesus used even the practical talents of Judas, knowing, as He must have known, that in the end he would betray Him. One commentator asserts that there is nothing in the record to show that any one of the twelve was above the age of twenty-one when chosen.

"Empty Vessels."

There was not among the twelve a noted educator or a speaker of pre-eminence—not one who could claim any superiority over the Master Himself or assume to advise Him as to the things to be taught. They were "empty vessels," ready and willing to be filled.

How different would have been the character of His disciples had Jesus had in mind the setting up of a temporal kingdom! He would have needed men of political influence, men of executive ability, men of military experience, men of persuasive speech, and there can be no possible doubt but that He would have secured such and attached them to Himself.

But His kingdom was not of this world, and He called to His companionship men from among the common people; they *"heard Him gladly,"* and, *"leaving all, followed Him."*

It will be noticed that the authority which Christ

first delegated to His apostles was over disease; it was "*against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease.*" In the eighth verse, the instructions were repeated: "*Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give.*"

Healing by Prayer.

Whatever may be said, today, about physical healing by prayer, it cannot be successfully denied or doubted that the power to heal was conferred upon the disciples by the Saviour and was exercised by them as it was by Christ Himself. And this power did not differ either in kind or in degree from the power exercised by the prophets of the Old Testament, or rather *through* them, for they only claimed to be the instruments through which God worked.

Of course, no one who believes in a Supreme Being will attempt to set limits to God's power or to deny that God *can* heal.

It matters not upon what ground the admission of power rests, although some qualify their admission until its value is very much impaired. The members of one group bring their views on this subject into harmony with their views on other subjects by defining a miracle as the result of higher laws unknown to us. On this theory, one may contend that we will some day understand Bible miracles that are not now understandable by reason of our lack of knowledge.

The telegraph and the telephone, for instance, were not understandable until man became acquainted with some of the potentialities of electricity. The radio is still scarcely understandable, although millions "tune in" and boys manufacture their own receivers. These things which seemed simple enough once they were understood, would have been extraordinarily mysterious to the masses had only a few understood them.

The Mystery of Miracles.

But while future discoveries may explain by natural laws—laws as yet unknown—the miracles recorded in the Old and New Testament, it must be admitted that none of these miracles have been explained by any discoveries made by man. Yet we cannot question God's ability to overcome by His omnipotent power any law that He has made, just as one overcomes the force of gravitation when he raises a weight, or as an insect overcomes the same law when it lifts a foot.

In other words, whenever we attempt to limit God's power by any law that finite minds have discovered, we really deny to God the possession of infinite power.

Among those who accept the Christian God and believe Him to be a real Being, there can be but two questions—not *can* God do any specified thing, but *did* God do it, and *would* God do it?

To say that some of the acts of Jesus and the Chosen Twelve may be explained in the *future* is merely to say that all things are possible; but it is

not unfair to insist that the failure to find explanations during a period so fruitful in scientific discoveries makes the future discovery of explanations of the miracles at least improbable.

It will not do, however, to say that the explanation suggested—namely, that they are accounted for by the operation of some higher law as yet unknown—is the only one.

God's Limitless Power.

The power of God to make laws was not *exhausted* when He spoke into being the natural laws now known; neither can we question His power or His right to make special laws as well as general laws or to suspend any law at any time according to His will.

If the Old Testament is true, God did, through His prophets, heal the sick and raise the dead.

If the New Testament is true, Christ also healed the sick and raised the dead and, as recorded in the Scripture we are considering in this chapter, actually conferred upon His apostles the same power that He exercised Himself.

Those who dispute the veracity of the Bible record in those portions that describe the performance of miracles in the Old and New Testament do not advance proof to the contrary, for the simple reason that there is no opposing evidence. The assertion they make is that God would not do the things described and, therefore, did *not* do them.

If it is conceded that at any time in the past supernatural means of healing were actually em-

ployed, the burden of proof would seem to be on those who deny that such means can or would be employed today. Until the authority of the Bible can be overthrown, we must admit that there was healing by prayer; should we not be open-minded enough to examine into the merits of the evidence offered in support of the proposition that such healing is done today?

Christ's Mission.

"These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

Christ's mission was first to the Jews. His apostles were chosen from the Jews and here they were specifically warned against making any appeal to the Gentiles or Samaritans. Later, Peter was instructed in a vision to preach to the Gentiles and Paul was made "a chosen vessel" to bear the Saviour's Name to the Gentiles.

In the wording of the Great Commission, preaching is placed second. Healing comes first and is described with great detail. Then we get this word: "*And as ye go, preach, saying, The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.*"

The miracles established the authority of Christ and of His followers; those who were convinced by manifestations of His supernatural power listened to His preaching and to the message of His followers.

XIII

CHRIST AND THE STILLING OF THE STORM

MARK 4: 35-41

WE have a comforting study before us in this fourth chapter of Mark. Even the very title is soothing. "The Stilling of the Storm" is as euphonious as "the angle of repose"—a phrase that I learned at Panama, some years ago, when I asked when the slides would cease? "When the sides reach their angle of repose," an engineer replied.

That is not only a smooth-sounding phrase, but it is what mankind is seeking—"the angle of repose"—a condition of security, when fears will no longer disturb. So "The Stilling of the Storm" embodies assurance in words that are musical and soothing to the ear.

After His deliverance of "The Parables by the Sea," Jesus sought to escape for a while from the throng that His fame attracted. While His spirit remained unwearied, His body needed rest; the human side of Him had the weaknesses of the flesh. "*Let us pass over unto the other side,*" He said. There was quiet there.

"And there arose a great storm of wind, and the waves beat into the ship, so that it was now full" (v. 37).

The following explanation of the sudden winds that are characteristic of this small body of water—sometimes called a sea, sometimes a lake, is given by William M. Thomson:

"To understand the causes of these tempests, we must remember that the lake lies low, six hundred feet lower than the ocean; that the vast and naked plateaus of the Jaulan rise to a great height, spreading backward to the wilds of the Hauran and upward to snowy Hermon; that the water courses have cut our profound ravines and wild gorges, converging to the head of the lake, and that these act like gigantic funnels to draw down the cold winds from the mountains."

In a former chapter I referred to my own experience on the Sea of Galilee, when it was necessary to lower the sails because of the sudden gusts of wind.

A Deserved Rebuke.

"And He was in the hinder part of the ship, asleep on a pillow; and they awake Him, and say unto Him, Master, carest Thou not that we perish?" (v. 38).

It would seem that the disciples ought to have had confidence enough to feel sure that nothing could harm them while the Saviour was on board, but at this time even His most intimate companions could hardly realize how precious a per-

sonage the little boat was carrying as it buffeted the waves.

It was a deserved rebuke that He gave them when He said, "*Why are ye so fearful? How is it that ye have no faith?*" (v. 40).

It will be noticed that He saved them first and upbraided them afterward—and that, too, in the kindly spirit with which He usually treated the doubts and fears of His followers.

Here again we have evidence that the very weaknesses of Christ's companions gave opportunity for manifestations of His majesty.

Even at this far distant day we are gathering some advantage from the fact that Christ's disciples but partially comprehended the supernatural character of the Great Teacher. Had they, relying upon His ability to save Himself and them, been undisturbed by the storm, we would not have had this proof of the fact that He shared with our Heavenly Father complete power over the elements as over all other things.

"*Peace, Be Still.*"

"*And He arose, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm*" (v. 39).

A miracle? Yes, and as impressive to His disciples as to the millions who have read of it in the Book of books.

Miracles have been commented upon so often in these pages that it is not necessary to reassert the Creator's power to perform miracles; neither is it

necessary to deny the reasonableness of those who question God's willingness to perform miracles, however the word miracle may be defined.

God is *able* to perform miracles—of this there can be no doubt. That God *may desire* to perform miracles cannot be denied; the fact that He *did* perform miracles is established by the authority of God's Word.

The movement of air-currents is a mystery to man; "*the wind bloweth where it listeth*" still. Man may advance theories, based upon observation as to *how* winds arise and as to why they travel in this direction or that, but *when* winds will arise or in what *direction* they will travel, or what *velocity* they may acquire—these are as much beyond the knowledge of man as they were when the morning stars sang together.

Christ's Supernatural Power.

Nothing, however, is a mystery to God; He who created the winds and the waters can compel them to do His will. He can turn them loose and harness them again; He can set them in motion and He can also calm them.

Christ, His Son, being one with God and equal with the Father, could do whatever the Father could do. On this occasion He spake peace to the winds and the waves, and they obeyed Him.

Dr. Jefferson, commenting on the naturalness of Christ's supernatural power, says: "The New Testament miracles are credible because they are attributed to Jesus of Nazareth. It is not hard to

believe that He worked miracles. Great things were natural and easy to Him. He never strained in the doing of them.

"He never spoke of His acts as though they were wonderful. The most miraculous things He ever did were as natural to Him as our most ordinary acts are to us. A person who has moulded the heart-life of races and created a new civilization, as Jesus has undoubtedly done, may reasonably be believed to have said to the winds and to the sea, '*Peace, be still.*'"

A Practical Lesson.

But we are not following these New Testament passages merely to review the facts, but to draw, if possible, new strength from those facts and to make practical application of them to our daily lives.

In "The Stilling of the Storm" there is a very practical lesson. Storms arise in every life, sometimes suddenly, and we need aid from the One—the only One—who can control the tempest.

Sometimes these storms are as unexpected as the gusts of wind that make the Sea of Galilee so treacherous. A word may start a quarrel and anger thus aroused may result in violence, even murder. Scarcely a day passes but we read of some grave tragedy that has grown out of a trivial cause.

Gusts of passion are common and we sometimes forget that we can call upon Him at all times to save us from the perils of passion by helping us to resist the temptations that come with them.

But it is not in the great crises of life only that we need help from the One who can still the tumult and subdue the storm.

Jesus' Gentle Hand.

Our lives are marked by a multitude of little irritations. We need the gentle hand of Jesus to smooth out our difficulties as a fevered patient needs the tender touch of a dear friend. The Master who is equal to titanic tasks is equal, also, to the minute trials that beset His humble followers.

These trials may look insignificant to us. As we glance back at them, these trials and irritations may appear insignificant enough. But as they approached us we were made afraid, and as we passed through them, they caused us to feel downcast and deeply disturbed. Sometimes we were so much agitated that we forgot the promise that His strength would always be sufficient for us.

Christ has been called "the quiet King." He moves as noiselessly as the forces of Nature—as noiselessly as the flower unfolds, as the peach paints the blush upon its cheek, as the sap rises in the tree and nourishes the leaves. He can breathe peace into the trembling heart as the Creator breathed into man the breath of life.

To Whom Shall We Go?

Every heart that ever beat has searched for peace —*"man is born unto trouble as the sparks fly upward."* All our pleasures contain a certain amount of alloy; all our friends disappoint us at times; our

own plans miscarry; we err in judgment and our wisdom fails—to whom else can we turn? Man cannot buy peace with money; he cannot purchase it by social distinction; fame cannot insure it.

What can we do? There is but one Name we can invoke—the Name that is above every name.

Jesus will walk with those who sorrow and be to them a comforter; He will be the companion of those who are tempted; He will supply strength sufficient for every time of need.

He substitutes love for hatred; friendship for ill will, co-operation for antagonism—He is, in very truth, the Prince of Peace.

His boat is large enough for all who love Him and desire to follow Him. If any dangers affright us while He sleeps, we can awaken Him. He may rebuke us for our lack of faith, but He will keep us from harm.

"What manner of Man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?"

XIV

CHRIST AND THE FEEDING OF THE FIVE THOUSAND

JOHN 6: 1-15

"*AND a great multitude followed Him, because they saw His miracles which He did on them that were diseased.*" In these words John begins his simple narrative of "The Feeding of the Five Thousand," in the sixth chapter of his Gospel.

Here again we have the miracle used as convincing proof of Christ's supernatural power. The people followed Him, not because they caught the spirit of the message which He delivered, but "*because they saw His miracles.*"

They might dispute about His theology, but they could not differ or dissent when they saw disease flee at His touch. The *reason* for the performance of miracles has led some to attempt a distinction between the miracles recorded in Holy Scripture, accepting some and discarding others.

One writer, for instance, accepts the Resurrection but rejects the Virgin Birth, explaining that the former was, in his judgment, needed to prove that Christ was the promised Messiah, while, in his

opinion, there was no arbitrary or sufficient reason for the latter.

Unreasonable Criticism.

Such discrimination made between accounts equally authenticated, illustrates the unreasonableness of such criticism. One must have superconfidence in himself to attempt to decide, upon the scanty proof that he is able to collect, whether there was, or was not, sufficient reason to justify an infinite God or His infinite Son in manifesting the supernatural power required for the performance of a miracle.

The One who possesses such power is an infinitely better judge as to the proper occasion for its exercise than an entirely human and hostile critic. And is not the testimony of those who saw the miracle performed far more weighty than the opinion of a sceptic expressed nineteen centuries later?

"*When Jesus then lifted up His eyes,*" the narrative continues, "*and saw a great company come unto Him, He saith unto Philip, Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat?*"

In some instances we are left to infer why Jesus did what He did, or said what He said, but here the reason is given: "*And this He said to prove him: for He Himself knew what He would do*"

A Needed Lesson.

That Philip needed the lesson which he was soon to learn is evident from his reply. Applying material rules, he said, "*Two hundred pennyworth of*

bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may take a little."

Andrew took the same despondent view of the situation, and suggested, "*There is a lad here, which hath five barley loaves, and two small fishes: but what are they among so many?*"

In bringing out the *seeming* impossibility of feeding the multitude with so little provision before showing that nothing is impossible with God, Christ employed a familiar oratorical device.

Question and answer—a time-honoured form of argument—focus attention upon the particular point involved in the inquiry, and the truth presented in the answer is made more impressive because it is called out by the question. But the impression made by a truth is still further deepened if the one to whom it is addressed can be induced to deny in advance—mentally or audibly—the possibility of the thing which is afterwards proven.

The Amazed Disciples.

Christ knew what He could do, and He also knew that His possession of such infinite power was not fully understood by His disciples. They had seen Him convert water into wine, cure the nobleman's son, and heal the impotent man at the pool of Bethesda, but each new miracle amazed them. How could they imagine the plenitude of His power or guess when He would deem it wise to exhibit that power?

The feeding of the five thousand did not, as a

matter of fact, require the exercise of any more or higher power than the performance of any other miracle. There are no degrees in the infinite. As nothing, multiplied no matter how many times, still remains nothing, so the infinite, no matter how often divided, is still infinite.

The multiplication of the loaves and fishes was miraculous only because the element of time was eliminated. Loaves are, in effect, multiplied throughout the world every year. Each grain of barley can feed a multitude if given time. If each grain that is planted yields an hundredfold, a few generations will suffice to provide bread for any number.

Christ's Sympathy.

So with the fish, who ever are busy supplying man with an important form of food. They not only save man the labour of collecting the nourishment contained in their bodies, but they collect what man cannot find or combine. But it takes time. Time, however, is as much a creation of the Almighty as space, and the objects that fill all space.

Besides convincing His disciples that He was not subject to human limitations, Jesus demonstrated His sympathy for those who thronged to hear Him.

Tolstoy declares that it is not sufficient to have toiled in the past, but necessary to continue to toil. He argues that we first put the drudgery of life upon others, and then look down upon them because they do what we do not want to do.

Whether the Russian philosopher was entirely correct or not, it is certainly true that sympathy is one of the greatest of human needs.

The Sin of Indifference.

"Man's inhumanity to man" does, as Burns puts it, make "countless millions mourn," but there is a sin more prevalent and therefore more injurious than positive injustice or inhumanity, and that is indifference, or lack of sympathy. It was lack of sympathy in Dives that led Christ to arraign him so severely.

The rich man was inflicting no bodily injury upon Lazarus; he was guilty of no violence toward him—he simply was indifferent to his hunger and his suffering. Dressed in purple and fine linen, he fared sumptuously every day, while Lazarus, covered with sores, had to content himself with the crumbs which fell from the table of Dives.

The world is full of suffering today. Some of it is due to lack of intelligence, and cannot be wholly relieved without removing a spur that is necessary to improvement. This truth is illustrated by the Parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins.

Part of it is due to lack of industry, and cannot be wholly removed without encouraging indolence. This story is illustrated by the Parable of the Talents.

God's law of rewards recognises the right of both intelligence and industry to compensation commensurate with service rendered. The most fundamental laws of life would be nullified if the ignorant

and the idle were permitted to share equally with those who have foresight and diligence.

A still larger part of the world's misery is due to demoralising habits and low ideals. Such suffering cannot be wholly removed. "*The wages of sin is death.*"

Victims of Misfortune.

But when proper allowance is made for ignorance, idleness and objectionable habits, there still remains much suffering that is due to causes that do not reflect upon the character or virtue of those who suffer.

Such victims of misfortune excite sympathy and deserve assistance. They furnish to the sympathetic an opportunity to learn by actual experience that "*it is more blessed to give than to receive.*" It is not only commendable to feel an interest in the unfortunate, but it is a reflection on one—a proof of hardness of the heart—not to be sympathetic to the point of generosity.

It was Christ who roused the world to an understanding of the meaning of universal sympathy based on universal love. His life and teachings have inspired the altruistic sentiment that today moves the civilised world to build hospitals, orphan asylums, homes for old people, and eleemosynary institutions of various kinds.

Many who reject Christ as a Saviour, and ignore Him as a Teacher, have caught the spirit of the Master, and follow in His footsteps in this respect,

while denying the source of the spirit of benevolence that actuates them.

The same Jesus who went about doing good, who gave as an evidence of His Messiahship that the poor had the Gospel preached to them, and who was touched at the sight of the people who seemed as sheep having no shepherd—this same Jesus was distressed when He saw a multitude of men and women so intent on following Him that they endured hunger rather than turn back to their homes. It was to minister unto them that He performed one of the most impressive of His miracles—and performed it with as little ceremony as He would set a table for a few friends.

Giving Thanks.

Here, as aways, He gave thanks—a rebuke to the millions who devour what a loving Father has provided without a word of appreciation or a thought of gratitude. If those who witnessed this miracle of "The Feeding of the Five Thousand" were convinced of Christ's claims, how can people today, after nineteen centuries have confirmed the Christian faith, doubt that He is Lord?

In all these years, no rival has appeared, neither has any one been wise enough to add to, or take from the moral code which He enunciated, or powerful enough to perform the miracles which He performed.

XV

CHRIST AND SIMON PETER'S CONFESSION

MATTHEW 16: 13-20

"SIMON, called Peter," was one of the greatest of New Testament characters—one of the most influential men of all time.

Regardless of the differences of construction placed upon Christ's words to Peter at Cæsarea Philippi by different branches in the Christian Church, he stands out as an heroic character.

In the heights to which he rose and the depths to which he fell, he presents a striking example of human strength and weakness.

When at his best he inspires as few mortals do; his errors warn us against the power of temptation and encourage the frail by showing how mistakes can be atoned for and how a true follower of Christ may grow in grace and in fortitude. Always it must be remembered that the Peter who was guilty of over-confidence, of betraying Christ, and of being surprised at the Resurrection, is the same Peter who afterward stood like a rock in defence of Christianity.

Speaking by Inspiration, he gave counsel, uttered wisdom and was among the foremost of those who laid the foundation of the Christian Church.

He did not write as much as Luke or Paul or John, but his influence upon the Church and upon the progress of Christianity was equal, if not superior, to that of any other follower of Jesus.

In the account which Matthew gives us of what transpired at Cæsarea Philippi we find that the first question put by the Master brought out the fact that the Jews, impressed by the supernatural power of Christ, believed Him to be more than a man, but differed as to His identity. *"And they said, Some say Thou art John, the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets."* Their speculations covered a wide range.

He could not have been John the Baptist, because they both lived at the same time—Jesus was baptized by John in the Jordan. And what a difference between Elijah, the prophet of fire, and Jeremiah, the prophet of tears! Christ was universal in that He embodied every form of greatness, and represented every virtue.

Brushing away the opinions of others, Christ pressed home the personal question, *"But whom say ye that I am?"*

This is the universal question today in every civilised land. Each individual must, on reaching maturity, answer the question. It cannot be ignored; it cannot be evaded. *"What think ye of Christ?"*

Peter answered for the disciples. *"Thou art the Christ, the son of the living God."*

And what followed?

First, a blessing was pronounced upon Peter—*"Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona."*

Second, recognition of Christ's real character is accepted as evidence of a revelation from God—*"For flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but My Father which is in heaven."*

Third, the answer gave to Peter distinction among his fellow-disciples.

Fourth, Peter's confession is a foundation of the Christian Church.

Peter's answer was clear and unequivocal; it was complete.

He did not, like some of the Jews, put Christ among the prophets. He did not, like Nicodemus, declare Him to be *"a teacher come from God."* He did not say, as some do today, that He was "a perfect man," or the "wisest of men," or "the greatest of philosophers."

He said, *"Thou art the Christ."*

The word "Christ" had a meaning to the Jews. It was applied to the Messiah, and to the Messiah only—"the Anointed One." The Messiah, or Christ, had been described by the prophets, and had a personality distinct and separate from all others.

No Middle Ground.

Peter did not stop with a declaration of Christ's Messiahship, but added, *"The Son of the living God."*

There is no middle ground when we come to determine the character of Christ; He was either a man, and a man only, or He was God manifest in the flesh.

If He were merely a man, He was Himself de-

ceived, or practiced deliberate deception. That He was, as He claimed to be, the Son of God, was affirmed by those intimately associated with Him, proven by His miracles, by His incomparable words, by His infinite love and willing sacrifice, and even more conclusively by the revelation of Himself that He makes to those who confess Him before men.

The first part of Jesus' answer to Peter contains a truth, the importance of which can hardly be overestimated; viz., that spiritual truths are spiritually discerned.

The joy of fellowship with Christ can be learned only from the inside of the relationship; it is not revealed to those who seek to penetrate its mysteries from without. "Flesh and blood" are impotent to comprehend or to convey a knowledge of what Jesus is to those who accept His atonement, trust His saving grace, and are guided by His heaven-born wisdom.

Christianity's Basic Truth.

Peter was the first to make this whole-hearted surrender of himself, and to embody in his confession the basic truth of Christianity. It gave him a place of leadership among the disciples; from that time he was the head of the group and the dominating figure in it. Even his impetuous mistakes and his denial of his Saviour, three times repeated, at the trial, could not obscure the inner light that grew brighter with the years, and shone out most gloriously in his martyrdom.

The answer made by Peter is the basis of religion as distinguished from intellectual admiration.

Religion is revealed—it does not come through flesh and blood. The comprehension of Christ is an exercise of the spiritual in man and comes from the Father above.

To recognise the wisdom of much that Christ taught does not require a new birth. The practical value of His utterances can be discerned where those utterances apply to familiar subjects and where their truth can be proven by everyday observation. Those who study Christ's words in this way compare Him with other teachers and admit His superiority.

Mere Admiration Not Enough.

But that is not enough. No Church could have been founded on human testimony based upon human judgment and human observation. Those who admire uninspired philosophers occasionally organize clubs for the study of the speeches or writings of the person admired, but a club is not a church.

Christ founded a Church which was to stand for all time, whose doors were to be open to the people of all nations and which had behind it all power in heaven and in earth; His followers were to teach all the things that He had commanded.

No one else has ever laid such a claim to power. If Christ had been an impostor, He would have been by far the greatest impostor the world has ever known. If His would have been the most

gigantic delusion recorded in history. But He was *not* an impostor and His followers were *not* deluded.

A Heart Relationship.

Entrance into Christ's Church—not the visible ones which are presided over by human beings, but the Church invisible—is entered by satisfactory answer to the question which Christ propounded to Peter.

To become a member of this invisible Church one must accept Christ as "*the Son of the living God*" —he must accept Christ as Christ describes Himself when He said: "*I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life.*"

It is a heart relationship that exists between human beings and Christ's spiritual kingdom. "*With the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.*"

Difficulties may arise, perplexing questions may be propounded—questions which the mind cannot answer or explain—but intellectual questions will not disturb one so long as the heart is right and the faith sound.

"*Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief,*" is the characteristic attitude of one whose heart has taken hold upon Christ and will not let go, although the mind may be puzzled by problems that arise. Like the blind man, the Christian can say, "*One thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see.*"

And here is a great fact I desire most earnestly

to emphasize—the Church of Christ will stand—*"the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."*

The Church's Indestructibility.

Conclusive proof of its Divine origin is to be found in the fact of its indestructibility. No other organization formed among men has had so stormy a history. It has had foes within, as well as foes without. It can neither be overpowered by external enemies nor rent asunder by conflict between its members.

All the force that mighty governments could command was brought to bear against it in the beginning in the hope of exterminating it; but the blood of the martyrs proved to be the seed of the Church. The more ferocious the attacks upon it, the more heroic were those who formed it. They won by suffering and sacrifice what they could not have secured by any exercise of power or use of violence; and the faith of our fathers is living still.

Internal dissensions have been much more of a menace to the Church than has outside persecution. Division after division has threatened its existence; but, instead of destroying the Church, these divisions have multiplied its members. The centriputal and centrifugal forces seem to have kept it in its orbit—and it continues its resistless courses.

Efforts are constantly being made to heal divisions and to reunite separated groups. Whatever may be said as to the wisdom of these efforts, and

whatever results they may produce, there is no reason why Christians should be discouraged or disheartened. While there is power in unity, it is possible to have unity in purpose and cordial co-operation in practise without the surrender of separate organization.

It is not necessary that all families should be united in one or live together in one house in order to have the most friendly co-operation. It has been found possible for all the families of a community, though living in separate homes, to join in promoting the welfare of the whole.

So with the several branches of the Christian Church; no matter whether separated by forms of government or differences in interpretations of Scriptures, they can present a solid front against materialistic ideas and ideals.

The One Foundation.

The Church has always stood, stands today, and must ever stand, upon Peter's answer, "*Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.*" Nothing less meets the requirements of a sinful world.

If education would suffice, no Christ would be needed. For several thousand years the world has had a written history in many languages, and each generation is the heir to the learning of preceding centuries. The moralists have moralized, and the philosophers have philosophized, but sin goes on, immorality continues, and crime abounds. Educators still teach (on the theory that it is a necessary precaution) the art of taking human life, and scien-

tists are busy devising new implements of destruction—why? Because purely intellectual processes lack the one thing needful; and that is—love.

A Haven for All.

The Church welcomes the educator—the most highly educated; there is nothing in Christ or His Church to repel them if they come in the spirit of Peter. But the Church is more than a college society; it is for the unlettered, also—it is a haven of rest for all who are weary and heavy laden, if they are willing to take Christ's yoke upon them and learn of Him.

The Church welcomes the rich, if they have earned their money by giving equivalent service in return; there is nothing in Christ's words or in His Church to repel such, so long as their money is consecrated with them. But the Church can never be merely a rich man's club; it must be open to the poor, for whom Christ also died—to all who come with contrite heart.

The Church must stand firmly on Peter's confession, and offer to the world the full-statured, the supernatural Christ, as the Bible presents Him; it must do this or fail in its high purpose, and surrender the Great Commission issued to it by the risen Saviour, Who promised to be with His followers always, even unto the end of the world.

XVI

CHRIST AND MARY OF MAGDALA

LUKE 8:1-3; JOHN 19:25; 20:11-18

MARY OF MAGDALA was one of the many who had experienced the healing power of the Saviour. Seven demons——"devils," as it reads in the Old Version—had gone out of her.

We possess no account of her healing nor any other mention of her except that, together with certain other women, she ministered to the needs of Jesus, and in the account of Christ's crucifixion and resurrection. But enough is said to give her an exalted place in sacred history.

Luke tells us that as Jesus went about through cities and villages with His disciples, preaching and bringing the good tidings of the Kingdom of God, certain women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities ministered unto Him of their substance. Mary Magdalene is mentioned first; associated with her were Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others.

All of these women had been healed of some disease or infirmity, but Mary is the only one whose affliction is specifically described. The healing ex-

plains, in part, the devotion which gives her a claim to special consideration.

It is not strange, that all over the world women have been quick to respond to Christ's call and to find delight in His service. He did more to dignify womanhood than anyone else, and His friendship was always shown where it was specially needed.

Jesus the Friend of Womankind.

In New Testament times, woman, in the Orient, occupied a servile, subordinate position. Outside the province of Christian civilization she *still* holds it. But Christ made her man's comrade and co-labourer. Women are principal characters in a number of important incidents related in the Gospels and Christ freely expressed His appreciation of their ministrations.

Mary Magdalene had the "grace of gratitude" —a virtue which suggests the first practical lesson this study yields. Do we examine the account as often as we should and estimate the value of the gifts that come to us freely and without any merit of our own?

God's Gift to Man.

Our greatest indebtedness is to the Creator. When we look about us and see the evidences of His handiwork, we are amazed at the vastness of His power and the infinitude of His intelligence.

Our little earth, which seems so big to us, is but a speck in the universe. The distances between us and the moon, the planets and our sun, appalling as

they seemed to us when we were studying them in school, are quite insignificant when we compare them with the distances that separate other and larger heavenly bodies.

When we turn from the almost measureless stretches with which astronomy deals to our own globe, we find nearly a hundred original elements which, separately or in a multitude of combinations, make up the material world.

When we turn from the inanimate to the animate we find more than a million distinct forms of life populating the vegetable and animal kingdoms.

Above all and ruling over all, we find man, "*but a little lower than the angels,*" and endowed with powers and capacities that approach the incalculable.

The Creator has singled him out to be the recipient of the greatest evidences of His power, the highest manifestations of His intelligence, and the largest expressions of His love.

The Father's Kindly Care.

Our growth from birth to maturity proceeds without conscious effort on our part. The organs of the body perform their functions without calling on us for assistance or advice. The pendulum of the heart swings to and fro, driving new blood into every part of the system and drawing out that which is exhausted. The lungs expand and contract; the nerves keep their tireless vigils while we sleep.

If living required volition or active aid from us

we would have time for nothing else—we could not live—but the Loving Heavenly Father who created us, provides for us and watches over us with a kindly care which no language can adequately describe. Are we as grateful as we should be for the blessing of life and the bounties that make it possible for us to enjoy that life throughout the years of man's stay upon the earth?

But life would be a punishment instead of a privilege if man were compelled to live alone.

The same Heavenly Father, therefore, who created life and provided the means by which it is sustained gave us the home with all of its hallowed influences—parental love, the love that binds brothers and sisters together and children to parents.

He gave us friendships also, and the social ties; He gave us the wisdom to organize and conduct governments; He gave us also the labours that employ our minds, and the fellowships that satisfy our hearts. He has made us heirs to all the past, the beneficiaries of all that man has done since history began.

The Best Gift of All.

To those who live in the present age God has been especially kind. He has given to man such a mastery over the forces of Nature as was never dreamed of by those who lived a few generations ago; education is being brought within the reach of every child; science, by discovering remedies for dread diseases, is making new sections of the

world habitable and relieving the anxieties of man everywhere.

A sense of gratitude for the gifts that come directly from the Heavenly Father, or indirectly from those who have lived before us and those who live about us, ought to overwhelm each one of us and stimulate a passion for service that we may pay back, at least in part, the incalculable debt we owe.

There is in the heart a sense of justice that is gratified when goodness is rewarded. If one does a kind act without thinking of recompense and, after a while, unexpectedly reaps a reward from the seed sown, we rejoice.

Casting bread upon the waters might be described as a far-sighted selfishness if one were thinking of himself; but selfishness is never far-sighted. One must give as the spring gives, without thought of reward, if he would give constantly and give largely and thus lay the foundation for rewards greater and more numerous than one can calculate.

Mary's Gratitude

Mary of Magdala gave signal evidence of her possession of a deep and continuing sense of gratitude. It was all she had to give to her Lord and Healer, and she gave it gladly, unquestioningly, and the giving led her into the happy region of unselfish service and worshipful acquaintance with her Master.

She had been a sufferer from one of the most dreadful of diseases—demonomania—and no one but the Saviour could restore her. When He had

lifted the load from her and set her free, her heart poured forth a stream of gratitude that flowed on through every moment that intervened between the day of her healing and the resurrection of her Lord.

Many were healed by the Saviour during the days of His evangelism; lepers were cleansed, the blind had their sight restored, the lame were made to walk, and the dead were called back to life; but she was the only one of that numerous company that followed Him all the way to the Cross and to the tomb.

When the tragedy of Calvary was reached, Mary was one of the four women who, standing in the group opposite to the four soldiers, presented the striking contrast between love and force—the two great principles that have striven for mastery throughout the life of the world.

Her constancy carried her to the burial place of the Great Physician to whom she owed so much. Finally, she was rewarded with the first glimpse of the Saviour, after His resurrection. He ascended to the Father. Of this incident we shall be given a glimpse in a subsequent chapter. Suffice it to say, at this point, that the great joy and privilege thus granted to Mary was a deserved recognition of a supreme loyalty—of a gratitude unsurpassed.

The story of Mary Magdalene is an age-long rebuke to those who are indifferent to priceless gifts—a continuing reminder that our days should be thanksgiving days for the mercy and loving-kindness of the God and Master of us all.

XVII

CHRIST AND HIS DISCIPLES ON MOUNT HERMON

LUKE 9:28-36

AND now, in our study of the events and companionships in the earthly life of our Saviour, we come to the fascinating narrative of the Transfiguration.

"*And it came to pass,*" we read in the ninth chapter of Luke's Gospel, "*about an eight days after these sayings, that He took Peter and John and James, and went up into a mountain to pray.*"

The selection of these three disciples to witness this supreme spectacle indicated a partiality toward them that has given them a permanent pre-eminence among the twelve.

Peter was the leader of the group—he is therefore named first. John, "the beloved," came next. He was then a young man and the favour shown him by Jesus proves the latter's power to search the heart and foresee the career. James is supposed to have been related by kinship to Jesus, as well as bound to Him by the tender ties of fellowship and friendship.

It was a blessed privilege that was accorded to these three men; that they appreciated it is shown

by the fact that two of them suffered martyrdom, James being the first of the disciples to seal with his blood, the testimony of his life.

"And as He prayed, the fashion of His countenance was altered, and his raiment was white and glistering."

"As He was praying"—here again we have divine sanction of prayer—prayer, not only commended by the example of the Saviour, who was in constant communication with God, but prayer commended by the unparalleled scene witnessed on Mount Hermon.

The Christian is nearer to heaven in the hour of prayer than at any other time, or, to put it another way, heaven bends down a little nearer to him then than at other times; the chariots from the celestial land "swing low" to carry the petitions of God's children up to His throne.

Proof of the Transfiguring.

The description given in the second verse of this passage records a change so marked that it could not escape notice. *"The fashion of His countenance was altered"* and *"His raiment was white and glistering."* Here miracle again challenges attention.

This elevation of the subject from the sphere of the natural to the sphere of the supernatural occurs so often that such evidence of the authority of God's word cannot be eliminated without entirely destroying the value of the Bible. If the Book of books is not to be believed when it records the evi-

dence of Christ's Sonship, what grounds have we for trusting it when only Christ's words are reported?

Those who presume to pick out certain parts of the Scripture and accept them, while rejecting others, overlook the fact that an attack upon the veracity of a writer, if sustained at any point, impairs the value of everything else he says.

In passing, it may be added that proof of the change of appearance in Christ recorded in our text is found in the fact that every one who accepts Christ and lives according to His teachings passes through a sort of transfiguration in *miniature;* the countenance conforms to the condition of the heart. Virtues as well as vices are written upon the face.

The Proof of Immortality.

"And, behold, there walked with Him two men, which were Moses and Elias."

The return of Moses and Elijah to the flesh gives us added proof of the immortality of the soul. Their material disappearance from earth occurred many centuries before; the former from Nebo on the east of the Jordan, the latter being translated. They now reappear and are visible to the disciples *"when they were awake."*

The reality of a life beyond the grave is a matter of vital importance. Belief in immortality is not only an unspeakable comfort to those who are parted from loved ones by death, but it is a restraint upon us in hours of temptation. No matter what other punishments may be in store for us, it

would cause one eternal anguish to be compelled to live with, and be known by those whom he had knowingly wronged.

Then, too, a future life is necessary for the administration of any system of justice. The wrongs done by the wicked to their fellows in this world cannot be adequately punished here. If rewards are to be distributed according to merit, the record cannot be closed on earth; there must needs be a place where the accounts can be finally balanced.

The presence of Moses and Elijah on Mount Hermon confirms the Christian's faith in immortality.

The Outstanding Lesson.

The principal lesson to be drawn from our text is, of course, the glorification of Christ. Like the descending of the dove at the time of His baptism, the Transfiguration laid upon the supernatural Jesus the benediction of His Heavenly Father. "*And there came a voice out of the cloud, saying, This is my beloved Son: hear Him.*"

Those whose hearts have been won over to the service of the Saviour have sufficient proof within that God revealed Himself to man through Christ, but the acceptance of Christ as Redeemer and Guide is a matter of such transcendent importance that proof is piled upon proof until conviction is complete.

Moses and Elijah "*spake of His decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem.*" It will be noted, here, that a future event was known to them,

and spoken of by them—another manifestation of the supernatural. This coming event could not be known by the exercise of any mortal faculty, and the *place* is also announced—Christ's decease was to be accomplished at Jerusalem.

A Startling Disclosure.

Here we come upon the most startling disclosure made—that Jesus was to accomplish His own decease. The passage reads: "*And spake of His decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem.*"

Christ could take up His life at will, and lay it down again at will. This power was known to Him, and it was also known to Moses and Elijah. The plan of salvation had been revealed to at least three—Jesus, Moses and Elijah.

The death of Moses was without violence, and Elijah was relieved of the necessity of entering immortality through the door of death, but it was known to all three that Christ would be subjected to crucifixion, the most cruel form of death, after being jeered and beaten at a mock trial. And all this suffering was to be endured that He might atone for the sins of man. "*With His stripes we are healed.*"

The indignities heaped upon the Saviour and the sufferings endured by Him have given Him an irresistible appeal to the heart of the world. A triumphant ending of His career, such as that given to the Prophet of Fire, or even a peaceful exit from life such as was granted to the great Lawgiver, would not have stirred the hundreds of millions as

they have been stirred by the despicable inhumanities practiced in the judgment hall and the agonies of the Cross.

Blundering Peter.

"And it came to pass, as they departed from Him, Peter said unto Jesus, Master, it is good for us to be here: and let us make three tabernacles; one for Thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias: not knowing what he said" (v. 6).

Peter was very human; he blundered frequently, but it is easier to excuse him on this occasion than at other times.

He was still under the spell of an experience without a parallel; he had been an eye-witness of a glorious spectacle, never seen before or since.

Awed by the dazzling brightness, he looked on in silence until the reincarnated guests departed; then he recovered his speech and suggested a not unusual method of commemorating the occasion. He was emotional and his exultation found an outlet in this thought of memorial tabernacles for which there were illustrious precedents.

Most events can be memorialised by tablets or material structures. It is an entirely worthy way in which to express gratitude and appreciation. Every nation has its monuments and memorial halls —massive evidences of affection or reverence. They testify to the worth of the living as well as to the merit of the dead.

Some have built stately tombs for deceased members of the family, like the pyramids of Egypt, or

the Taj Mahal in India. Others, more practical, have built colleges or memorial hospitals, of which there are many examples.

Eternal Altars.

But no man-made shrine could fittingly commemorate the glories of the Transfiguration. The scenes that move us most deeply are not embodied in stone or marble. Even the most durable substances that man can employ will finally crumble into dust; the *eternal* altars are erected in the heart —on these burn perpetual fires.

If a mother's love, lavished upon a child, goes on in ever-enlarging circles to the end of time; if a father's solicitude can project itself through immeasurable generations, how impossible to express by visible means a scene which calls from out the past two of the greatest leaders of Israel to look upon the Transfiguration of the only begotten Son of God and to hear the voice from the cloud proclaiming the Father's blessing on the Saviour and His task!

When all the towers and tabernacles—all the shining shafts and glittering domes—shall be swallowed up in Time's all-devouring oblivion, the hearts of increasing millions will still enshrine the sacred story in which we are given a glimpse of the wondrous scene on the mount in which the raiment of the Master became "whiter than Hermon's whitest snow."

XVIII

CHRIST AND JOHN "THE BELOVED"

LUKE 9:49-56; JOHN 19:25-27; I JOHN 4:7, 8

THE first of the Scriptures cited above records an incident that ought to have made a greater impression than it has upon the thought of the world. The lesson of tolerance is here set forth by Luke, and twice repeated within the limits of a few verses.

John, seeing some one casting out demons in the name of Jesus, forbade him and reported the matter to Christ. Jesus replied, "*Forbid him not: for he that is not against us is for us.*"

Soon afterward, a village of the Samaritans refused to receive certain messengers sent in advance to prepare a place for Christ. When James and John saw this, they said, "*Lord, wilt Thou that we command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?*" Christ turned and rebuked them. The Authorised Version contains two sentences that have been dropped out of the Revised—"*Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of,*" and "*For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them*"—but the rebuke is the same, whether expressed in a single word or in more extended language. It excludes the use of

force as a method of propagating Christianity or of punishing those who rejected Christ.

Here we find the origin of the laws respecting freedom of conscience. Christ's language has not always been regarded by Christians, but there is nothing in the words of the Saviour to justify the persecution of those who are deaf to His appeal.

Freedom of Conscience.

Christ's Gospel was intended for all and His appeal is to all—"*Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden*"—but the call is an invitation extended by love, not a commandment, enforced with penalties. It is not strange that the followers of Christ, so often the victims of violence themselves, should have been human enough to have been revengeful or misguided, but they find in Christ's words and acts no warrant for violence.

When I was in India, a Parsee asked me how so many different religions could live together peacefully in the United States, adding that self-government was denied to India on the ground that a multiplicity of religions would make peace impossible.

Christ's teachings on this subject, embodied in law, make it possible for any number of religions or any number of denominations of any religion to live together in peace in any country.

Each individual can worship God according to his own conscience, or refuse to worship God if he so desires. Each Church has a right to determine its own doctrines and to enforce its own discipline,

but its discipline ends with exclusion from membership, which is not a punishment, but the exercise of the same religious liberty by the organization that each individual claims for himself.

It is an impressive, as it is a noteworthy fact that this rebuke had to be delivered to the man whose name—after that of Jesus Himself—is associated in the New Testament with love and its universal application. Yet it was furnishing an indication that all who ever walked the earth are human, and prone to err and evince a spirit contrary to that of the Master.

John is singled out from among the apostles and described as the disciple whom Jesus loved. The account of the Last Supper mentions him as "*leaning on Jesus' bosom.*"

He was one of the three with the Master on Hermon at the time of the Transfiguration. He was the disciple in whose care Christ, speaking from the Cross, entrusted His mother. He was the first of the disciples to reach the tomb when they learned of the Resurrection, and he is the one in whose Gospel love is most frequently mentioned and most emphasized.

For these reasons it has been assumed by some that he was effeminate, a conclusion for which there seems to be no ground whatever. On the contrary, James and John were called "Boanerges"—which means "Sons of Thunder."

John is believed to have been a cousin of Jesus: his mother, Salome, it is thought, having been a sister of Mary. Prior to his discipleship, he was a

follower of John the Baptist, which indicates that his home-training had made him sensitive on the subject of religion.

John's Gospel differs from those of Matthew, Mark and Luke, in that he interpreted and expounded, while the others were given more to narrative. John only records six miracles and only one of these is recorded elsewhere. The five found only in John's Gospel were used as illustrations to show what may be regarded as the highest exhibition of supernatural power.

A Wonderful Text.

John's Gospel is the one used most in active evangelism. One verse—the sixteenth of the third chapter—has probably been the text for more revival sermons than any other verse in the Bible—*"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."*

In his first Epistle John gives us a definition of God which is universally employed—*"God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him."*

Like his brother James, and Peter and Andrew, John was a fisherman by occupation. He was unlettered—in the Book of Acts Peter and John are even described as "ignorant" as well as "unlearned." But John knew what love was; he could define and illustrate it. Learning like Paul's could be illumined by love and by love transformed into a force for righteousness, but learning alone is not

sufficient. John uses love as a test and by it determines whether one has been born again. *"We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren."*

He goes farther and departs from conventional language so far as to use the word "liar" in describing one who claims to love God and yet does not love his brother. He says, *"If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar."*

A Searching Analysis.

It is a searching analysis that he makes, and it is a numerous class that he arraigns.

Hatred of a brother may be considered under several heads, three of which deserve special attention. First, direct injury to a brother, such as one is guilty of who violates those of the Ten Commandments that relate to man's duty to his fellow man. No one will question that one shows his hatred of his brother when he kills, steals, bears false witness, or otherwise directly harms his fellow man.

But there is a second form of hatred which is manifested by a much larger group; those who injure their fellow men by indirect action. Two illustrations of this kind will be sufficient to show what is meant.

It was necessary to enact pure food laws to protect customers from those who manufactured food for sale. The man who sold the food did not come into contact with the customer who was injured. He had no revenge to satisfy; he had no personal ill will to prompt him; he was simply trying to

make his goods more saleable, but in doing so he menaced the health, even the life, of the consumer. The most extreme illustration of this came to my attention at the time that the pure food law was under consideration.

A wholesale liquor dealer who introduced himself on the train explained to me that since it embarrassed his wife and children to be asked about their father's occupation he was trying to get into some other business. He said that he had bought some stock in a candy factory and had thought of gradually working out of the wholesale liquor business into the manufacture of candy. Then he turned to me and, with great earnestness, said:

"But, Mr. Bryan, I found that they used so much adulteration in the manufacture of candy that I could not stand for it."

So, as a matter of conscience, he preferred the liquor business.

Times have changed since then and food is no longer a menace to health—but it required a law to protect its purity.

The second illustration is to be found in a recent law intended to prevent gambling in farm products. It required thirty years of effort to secure this legislation to protect the farmers—nearly a third of the population—from a handful of gamblers on the boards of trade and in chambers of commerce.

The gambler on the market had no special grudge against the farmer; he was intent only on making money; and it did not matter to him if, in the

manipulation of the market, injury was brought to both producer and consumer. He would have come under John's indictment no matter how much he declared his love of God.

The Most Numerous Class of All.

The third class is the largest of all—in this class the members show their hatred of brother, not by direct trespass upon his rights, or by doing harm to him indirectly for their own gain, but by indifference.

Christ condemns this class in the Parable of the Good Samaritan. The priest and Levite who went by without extending help did no injury directly or indirectly to the man who had fallen among thieves; they simply ignored him.

Love compels positive helpfulness. The Ten Commandments restrain us from doing any wrong act to our fellow men, but it requires something more than negative harmlessness to make a man a Christian. He must do good.

John's Response to Christ's Teachings.

If one will study the Gospel of John and live up to it he will understand why Christ perceived in its writer that which drew forth His love.

John's heart responded to the appeals of John the Baptist; it responded fully and completely to the teachings of Christ. He seemed to catch a larger vision of Christ's spiritual mission than the others; he came closer and closer to the Master, until their hearts beat in unison.

It is not strange that he should have been the one who revealed most clearly and most powerfully the Master's appeal to the heart of the world.

Nor is it strange that Christ should have put into John's hands the keeping of His mother when death was about to separate Him from her. It gives us a glimpse of the human side of Christ when in the throes of physical agony He turned to the disciple whom He most loved and to whom He had given the largest share of personal confidence and asked him to be the guardian of His mother.

We have no record of the subsequent life and death of Mary—her personality was lost in the majestic mission of the Son and Saviour. But this incident, told in a few words, gives a touch of tenderness to that day when Jesus completed the work that He came to perform and fulfilled the prophecies spoken hundreds of years before His birth and repeated by Him to His disciples.

Yes: it was a wonderful Gospel that John proclaimed—a God infinite in love sent His Son, our Lord, to save the people from their sins; thus Christ made love the basis of His Church and gave to mankind, as its rainbow of promise, the coming of a universal brotherhood, resting upon love and operating through love for the advancement of the welfare of mankind.

XIX

CHRIST AND MARTHA AND MARY

MARK 14: 3-9; LUKE 10: 38-42

THESE chapters and the thoughts they incite revolve about questions which relate to the conduct of two women, who are always mentioned together—Martha and Mary of Bethany, the sisters at whose home Christ was a frequent visitor; women who, in addition to their own friendship for the Master, were drawn closely to Him by the performance of one of His greatest miracles.

The sisters differed, as sisters often do, and this difference became the cause of a dispute that has made the two women familiar characters through all the Christian centuries. Martha was evidently the elder and head of the house; at least, Luke says that when Christ went into a certain village (Bethany), "*a certain woman named Martha received Him into her house.*"

Luke tells us, too, in the first-cited of the Scriptures standing at the head of this chapter, how both women sat at the Lord's feet and heard His words. Then follow three verses which, in a few words, picture Martha as engaged in serving while Mary, seemingly indifferent to Martha's over-burdening

tasks, remained wholly occupied with the words of Jesus.

Martha's irritation became so great that she ventured to bring the matter to the attention of her visitor, even blaming Him for not having administered a rebuke to Mary. Christ, in the most kindly manner, reproved Martha for her anxiety and commended Mary for having chosen the better part.

Two Long-Debated Questions.

Was Martha too practical, or was Mary too spiritual? These questions have been constantly discussed in church circles for nineteen hundred years with men and women in abundance to uphold both sides in the debate.

Martha performed a very necessary service; the care of the house necessarily falls on someone, and in most cases that someone is a woman. It is a very constant and confining work.

"Man works from sun to sun,
But woman's work is never done."

If there are two women of nearly equal age who share together the shelter and protection of the home, it is natural that they should divide the labour of housekeeping.

When visitors come, the work of the household is increased. Even a familiar friend adds something to the care that falls upon the hostess. If there was less anxiety in Martha's house because Christ was not a stranger, there was, on the other

hand, a greater pride because of the distinguished character of the guest.

It is a little hard to be impatient with the impatience of Martha; many come to her defence and are sharp in their criticism of Mary, in proportion as their sympathy is strong for the older sister.

Two Womanly Virtues.

But Mary has her champions. She was more spiritual than Martha and she did not hesitate to exhibit this characteristic even at the risk of being thought lazy, or, at least, indifferent, to the burdens borne by her sister.

Spirituality is a virtue and befits a woman quite as well as skill in housekeeping. There is no reason why a woman should not be both religious and practical—most women are. The work of the Church is done largely by women who have families and do housework.

Spirituality is not inconsistent with industry—how could it be a virtue if it impaired one's ability to perform the work that the Creator has made necessary to human existence?

There is no reason to believe that at ordinary times Mary lacked either ability to aid Martha or willingness to do so. On the contrary, Martha's remonstrance implies that Mary understood housekeeping just as well as Martha did—otherwise, why would she have expected assistance from her?

When Christ declared that He had come that *"they might have life and that they might have it more abundantly,"* He meant, as the facts prove,

that He added to the fullness of life without subtracting from any of its values.

Just as a spiritual vision of life prolongs the strength of the body and refines its pleasures—just as a spiritual vision directs the mind and enlarges its capabilities—so a spiritual vision ennobles the drudgery of the housewife, relieves the fatigue that might otherwise become unbearable and gives a glow of enthusiasm to the routine of the day. It lightens any task to do it in a Christian spirit.

All the Scriptural passages in which Martha and Mary are mentioned justify us in the belief that the spiritual Mary had a practical side to her life and that the practical Martha was not devoid of a spiritual element.

It was Martha who went to meet the Saviour when He made His seemingly belated visit to the grave of Lazarus; it was Martha also whose faith found expression in that wonderful burst of confidence: "*Lord, if Thou hadst been here, my brother had not died.*"

Both questions, therefore, may be answered in the negative. Martha was not too practical, neither was Mary too spiritual. The virtues were combined and blended in both of them.

A Rare Opportunity.

But at this particular time, Martha permitted herself to become so engrossed in the entertainment of the visitor that she underestimated the spiritual value of His visit; while Mary became so en-

grossed in the words of the Master that she neglected the preparation of the meal. It would seem, therefore, that the sisters differed merely in judgment as to the relative importance of Christ's words as compared with His physical needs.

Martha was bent on supplying the table with the bread that satisfies temporarily, but does not prevent hunger from returning; while Mary's thought was fixed on the "bread of life." Mary's choice, therefore, was the better in proportion as spiritual nourishment is superior in quality and more lasting.

It was a rare opportunity that the sisters enjoyed —that of entertaining in their home the Son of God and the Saviour of mankind. It was not so important that He should be pleased with savoury odours and fed on delicacies as that they should receive the heavenly manna that He alone could supply.

Two Wonderful Women.

No impartial jury, upon a full understanding of the facts, would render judgment against Martha or against Mary. Both were human—splendidly human.

If, for the moment, Martha erred in putting too much emphasis upon the meal and too little upon the priceless opportunity that came with the presence of Jesus, her perfect faith, manifested at other times, pleads eloquently in her behalf.

If Mary was, for a time, lured from her household tasks by the fascinating conversation of Him who spake as "*never man spake,*" she was forgiven

by the One who had power to forgive, and He it was who absolved her from blame for giving when the amount that she lavished on fragrant nard shocked the sordid sense of the disciple who afterward betrayed His Master.

Hail to both Martha and Mary—superb specimens of womanhood—whose names will, for all time, remain inseparably associated with that of their Saviour and Lord!

XX

CHRIST AND LAZARUS

JOHN 11:1-34

THE raising of Lazarus is one of the most beautiful narratives in Holy Writ; it records the affection of the Saviour as well as His supernatural power, and it also records the faith of the sisters of Lazarus.

In the opening verse of this ninth chapter from John we read the beginning of the account: "*Now a certain man was sick, named Lazarus, of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha.*"

The next verse tells us that the Mary mentioned was the woman who anointed Jesus and wiped His feet with her hair. Some commentators regard this statement as having reference to the scene which occurred in the house of Simon the leper. But the comment is entirely suppository. There is really no authentic evidence that the woman "*who was a sinner*" and Mary of Bethany are one and the same. But we shall glance more closely at this incident in a following chapter.

Mary and her sister Martha sent to Jesus, saying, "*Lord, behold, he whom Thou lovest is sick.*"

They knew that Jesus had power to heal and, knowing His affection for Lazarus, they confi-

dently expected Him to come at once and restore their brother to health.

The fact that Jesus loved Lazarus is the only fact we have upon which to make an estimate of the character of the latter. But that one fact is sufficient to establish his merit even if there were any contrary word; but there is none.

"For the Glory of God."

When the message was delivered to Jesus, He informed His disciples that this sickness was "*not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby.*"

The same thought is conveyed in the ninth chapter of this Gospel in which Christ declared that neither the man born blind nor his parents had sinned, "*but that the works of God should be made manifest in him.*"

It seems, therefore, that sickness (and even death, in this instance) may occur for the express purpose of permitting God's power to be proven.

If any one makes a protest against this Bible fact, he may recover his composure by considering that all that man has, even health and life itself, are the gift of God.

If man is on earth to carry out a divine plan, he must accept the part assigned to him, trusting in the wisdom of the Heavenly Father. God knows best whether the result to be accomplished justifies the means employed. Both of the cases referred to above resulted in the spread of belief in Christ's Messiahship.

It will also be noted that Jesus deliberately tarried where He was long enough for Lazarus to die. That He had in mind the miracle which He afterward performed is evident from the verse already quoted and from verses eleven to fourteen, in which He plainly told the disciples that Lazarus was dead, adding, *"I am glad for your sakes that I was not there."*

Here we have a supernatural knowledge of a death that occurred later at a distant place, and of an intended miracle. We also have the reason given for the performance of the miracle.

When Jesus arrived at Bethany, Martha was the first to greet Him. Somewhat reproachfully, possibly, and yet in faith she said, *"If Thou hadst been here, my brother had not died."*

When Jesus tried to assure her that her brother would rise again, she mistook His meaning and answered as if the Master had referred to the resurrection at the last day. An immediate resurrection was more than she hoped for or even thought of.

Jesus Weeps.

Martha went back to the house and secretly informed Mary, saying, *"The Master is come, and calleth for thee."*

Mary expressed the same faith that Martha had and in the same language. But neither realized the fullness of Christ's power. The sisters wept and their friends wept with them. Also, in the shortest verse in the Bible—a verse familiar to all

Sunday-school children—we are told that *"Jesus wept."*

Up to this time, faith in Christ's power was limited to His power to heal, but in this case He was to break the bonds of the tomb and call back to the body a spirit that had departed.

Even Martha, when Jesus asked that the stone be removed from the sepulchre, protested that the body had been in the grave four days and was in the process of decay. Jesus again reminded her of His promise which, it seems, had been too great for her to comprehend.

Christ thanked God in *advance* of the physical evidence that His silent prayer had been answered, and announced that the prayer was uttered aloud because of the multitude standing around *"that they may believe that Thou hast sent Me."*

Was it not worth while to employ the miracle to make known the power that He possessed as the only begotten Son of the living God, and to pray publicly in order to call attention to the power about to be exercised?

No Difficulty with Jesus.

The raising of the dead seems more astonishing than other miracles performed by Christ, and yet it does not differ from them; all of them required more than human power.

It was just as easy for a supernatural Christ to raise Lazarus from the grave as it would have been to stay the hand of death had He arrived earlier. In fact, He might just as easily have healed Lazarus

from a distance, without going to Bethany at all, but He chose this way because of the impression it would make—it was more convincing proof of His Divine character.

The profound conviction produced by this miracle is felt, today, and will be felt throughout the ages to come. Doubting Thomases would be more numerous at the present time but for the completeness of the evidence which Christ offered of His deity.

I have dwelt upon the miraculous element in these studies because it constitutes a vital factor in the belief of Christians. In this study it reaches its climax.

If One Accept.

If one accept as true the raising of Lazarus, he will not reject any other portion of the Bible. If, on the contrary, he reject this miracle, the reasoning that leads him to do so will, if carried to its logical conclusion, lead him to reject one by one the other miracles also, until all are discarded as unbelievable—not because they are unreasonable, but he, together with all of like critical mood toward the Scriptures, set out with a false major premise.

This premise assumes the existence of a fixed law that is inconsistent with the performance of miracles and those who stand on it proceed to rule out the miracle because it is contrary to the assumed law. In like manner, they assume that Christ was a man and nothing more; then they reject as unrea-

sonable or impossible every superhuman act and attribute.

But Christian believers begin with three assumptions: first, he assumes the existence of a God, all-wise, all-powerful, all-loving—a great First Cause, sufficient to account for anything that is or can be.

The Atheist's Attitude.

The atheist rejects the Christian's assumption and assumes the existence of matter and force as the source of all things in existence. The atheist does not explain the origin of matter and force, he *assumes* their existence as the Christian assumes the existence of a God.

The Christian, we contend, is more reasonable than the atheist because it is more rational to believe that the finite came out of the infinite than to believe that the infinite came out of the finite.

So with the Bible; when we consider its superiority over all other books, its record of prophecies fulfilled and its statement of truths that could not originate, so far as we can see, with the persons who stated them, it is more reasonable to believe that the Bible was inspired than that it is a man-made book.

Accepting the Bible as true, the Christian makes it the basis of his reasoning, while the unbeliever, rejecting it as an uninspired book, discards it as a collection of myths.

So, too, with Christ; the Christian believes the Bible account of Him to be true and, accepting Him, finds a convincing response in the heart.

Believing Christ to be what He claimed to be, the Son of God and equal with the Father, the Christian finds no difficulty in believing all that the Bible says of Him. It is reasonable for a supernatural Christ to do supernatural things—hence, reasonable for Him to raise Lazarus from the dead.

Such a Christ—and only such a Christ—can forgive sin. The proof of His power to raise from the dead one who had lain in the tomb four days enables us to believe that He can call back to spiritual life one who is "*dead in trespasses and sins*"—and that, being Himself lifted up, can draw all men unto Him.

Anyone who puts Christ in the *man* class finds the Bible more and more perplexing; those who put Christ in the *God* class find no perplexities whatever in the Word of God.

To begin right is the important thing. The Christian is advised to "*prove all things,*" and "*hold fast that which is good.*" But to reason, one must have something to start with. If we start with God, the Bible and Christ, we cannot go astray —and this is borne out by the testimony of hundreds of millions of believers.

XXI

CHRIST AND ZACCHÆUS

Luke 19: 1-10

THE story of Jesus and Zacchæus is a short story, but it is crowded with lessons for us all.

Zacchæus was a determined man, and determination is one of the most important of the virtues. Some people drift with the tide and take whatever comes; others resolutely face difficulties and overcome them. Pioneers are always hardy people because courage is a necessary part of their equipment—as indispensable as was the covered wagon that carried the early settlers across the Western prairies.

We might fear for the fibre of our people when there are no more forests to be cleared, no more deserts to be reclaimed, and no new Americas to be settled—we *might* fear, I say, but for the fact that civilization will always present problems that challenge the best that is in us.

A man like Zacchæus will succeed anywhere at any time and under any circumstances, and it would be quite unfair to leave out of consideration the zeal and intelligence displayed by the little publican. He calculated Christ's line of travel; he could have

done nothing if the opportunity had not come, and the opportunity would have passed by unimproved if Zacchæus had not used his own power to the limit; he put himself in the way of a blessing.

"Little of Stature."

In the account which Luke gives us of this incident we read almost at the very commencement that Zacchæus was *"little of stature"*—a decided disadvantage in the viewing of a procession. Possibly the tall men in the throng exchanged congratulations; they may even have made slighting remarks when they saw this diminutive man standing on tiptoe and straining his neck to see what others could see without effort.

But handicaps are a spur to a man who has determination; the very obstacles that discourage weak men arouse in others the conquering spirit.

Wealth, for instance, when anticipated, sometimes saps the energy, while poverty often nerves those who are victims of it to effort that they would not have otherwise made.

Zacchæus had a worthy purpose in pursuing the course he did—and that counts for much, if not for most.

Determination, when turned to the doing of wrong, has landed many a man in the penitentiary; the overcoming of difficulties is worse than idleness when the end in view is unworthy; but the determination of Zacchæus was wisely directed and the advantages which his determination secured for him were well employed.

If Zacchæus had been a large man, or even a man of average size, he would have stood with the throng and would have attracted no attention. There would have been nothing to distinguish him from the others or to indicate a greater zeal than that displayed by the multitude.

So it seems that his stature was a circumstance that played a very large part in the incident which forms the centre of this lesson. It had doubtless been a disadvantage to him to be small and, on this occasion, he may have been inclined to reproach himself upon his size. But his weakness became an element of strength; his misfortune was converted into an advantage of great value.

Necessity is often our best friend. We do things because we have to do them and, in the doing of them even from necessity, we often secure that which we would not have had but for the seemingly unfavourable conditions that coerced us.

No False Dignity.

Though rich and an official, Zacchæus had no false dignity to restrain his enthusiasm; he was not "stuck up," to use a familiar phrase.

Official position is sufficient to give some an exaggerated idea of their own importance, while riches give this offensive attitude to others; both combined did not make Zacchæus proud, or, if he was proud, his desire to see the Saviour overcame it.

There were many who took their places in the line, anxious to see, but none carried their earnest-

ness so far or became so conspicuous as Zacchæus; and, because of the unpopularity of publicans, no one was so unlikely as he to be singled out for special honour. Thus Luke tells us that "*he ran on before, and climbed up a sycomore tree to see Him.*"

Zacchæus did not make any pretensions. He sought only to see, not to be seen. But Christ saw in him a follower and called to him, "*Make haste, and come down; for today I must abide at thy house.*" And Zacchæus "*made haste, and came down.*"

There was no hesitation. He had heard of Christ; his curiosity had been excited. Possibly he was more than curious; he may have been on the very eve of declaring himself a follower. At least, he required not a second summons; he accepted the invitation immediately and joyfully.

The Murmuring Multitude.

The multitude murmured. How could one like Jesus be the guest of a man like Zacchæus, the sinner? There may have been many worse sinners in the crowd, but their sins were secret, while Zacchæus' business was notorious.

Tax-gathering is not calculated to make one popular and tax-gathering in the days when our Saviour was on earth was often the object of just criticism. Today, tax collectors in civilized countries have nothing to do with the assessing of taxes; they merely collect that which they are directed by law to collect. But in the days of Zacchæus taxes

were farmed out and the system invited abuse, extortion and oppression.

But Christ was a searcher of hearts, and He recognised in Zacchæus a real seeker after truth; He saw, too, solid virtues that the multitude overlooked.

It is natural to generalize. If most of the publicans were bad, then, according to the popular philosophy, all were bad. And, unfair as it is, it is the only philosophy that those who are not in position to separate the good from the bad and decide each case upon its merits have at their disposal.

Christ's Way of Judging.

But Christ was not restricted to general rules; He tried each case upon its merits. He inveighed against the indifferent rich—those who are the slaves of their possessions—those in whom "*the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the truth*"—but He did not hesitate to invite Himself to dine with one who, like Zacchæus, gave half his goods to feed the poor and returned fourfold to any from whom he had wrongfully exacted aught.

The extraordinary earnestness of the little man made him an object of interest; he attracted Christ's attention. And now for the part that Jesus had in the transaction.

He looked into the heart of the man in the sycamore tree and He saw there that which He did not find in the heart of the rich young ruler. The lat-

ter came to Him and professed a desire to follow Him, even pointing to a blameless life, and yet he went away sorrowing because he lacked the one thing needful, viz., a willingness to pay the price that Christ demanded—full surrender of self.

Zacchæus Justifies Christ's Confidence.

Zacchæus at once justified Christ's judgment of him. He did not leave the Saviour to bear unjust reproaches. The Pharisees were content to pay the tithe (one-tenth) required by the law; they were very exact about the amount—just that percentage and no more—but Zacchæus declared: "*Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken anything from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold.*"

It may not be amiss to consider here a very important fact. "They say" cannot always be accepted as a truthful or final judgment against one. Rumour is often unreliable. Many a man, thought to be miserly, has been found to be benevolent—his benevolence being unknown because not heralded from the housetop.

Christ is able to hear above the clamour and to see beyond the outward covering.

The conscientiousness of Zacchæus in this respect is a stinging rebuke to those who engage in respectable forms of larceny.

Moral laxity is so common that Christians are sometimes indicted with non-Christians for overreaching the public. Legislation became necessary to protect people from poison in merchandise;

anti-monopoly laws became necessary to prevent profiteering by wholesalers, and child labour laws became necessary to prevent the coining of the blood of minors into larger dividends.

If the sense of justice manifested by Zacchæus could be introduced into business, it would work a much needed reform. This short man teaches a very large lesson; he was small in stature, but great in the example that he set.

Wealth a Splendid Servant.

Consecrated wealth is a splendid servant, mighty in its power for good. If the wealth in the hands of Christians could be commanded for God's service as the wealth of individuals can be required by the nation in an hour of peril, the stream of salvation would be swollen into a great river.

The Christian nations are spending more than twenty-five millions a year in carrying the Gospel to the heathen; it might easily be multiplied ten fold without requiring great sacrifice on the part of Christians.

The funds spent on home missions might also be largely increased—how much cheaper it would be to stop crime at its source than to punish criminals after neglect has led them into wrong doing? Christian education could be vastly extended if only the money could be secured.

Paul credited the Macedonian Church with great liberality, with giving even more than they were able to give; they entreated the Apostles to receive their gift. What was the secret of their

generosity? They "first gave their own selves to the Lord"—after that, giving was easy.

What a Revival!

If one-half the income of Christians were available for Christian uses, what a revival there would be in Christian colleges, many of which are now starving to death—in home missions that are needed in so many newly settled regions—in the Americanization of immigrants and in the carrying of the Gospel to the heathen.

Zacchæus clubs might tax the generosity of church-members, but they would certainly bring refreshing showers to the cause of Christ. Even the giving of one-tenth—the tithe of the Old Testament—would greatly stimulate work in the Lord's vineyard.

There was never such an opportunity as the present offers for Christian benevolence. If all the followers of Christ gave half their goods for the advancement of God's kingdom, it would require only a short time to convert the world. The very fact that they gave half, if they did, would of itself go far toward converting the world.

"*This day is salvation come to this house,*" was Christ's answer to Zacchæus' declaration of conscience, adding, "*forsomuch as he also is a son of Abraham.*"

But the mere fact that Zacchæus was a descendant of Abraham would not have been sufficient if he, like the Pharisees, had disgraced the relationship or had been unrepentant. It is evident that the

inner Zacchæus was worthy of the line from which he came.

To be a member of a great race is a priceless gift; clean blood is a blessing that cannot be overestimated. Bodily strength and freedom from the diseases that descend from parent to child—who will calculate the value of such a legacy?

But Zacchæus had more than a worthy ancestry; he was heir to a promise.

He was a member of the greatest family that ever lived upon the earth—the family with a covenant.

He was proud of his lineage and thought the ancestral name worth protecting. With him, it was not an asset to be exploited, but a treasure to be guarded.

Zacchæus, as a Jew, was included in the plan of salvation, but the language employed by Christ indicates that the plan was not to be monopolized by a single family or a single race—"*For the Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.*"

He came to the Jew first and then to the Gentiles—*His call was to all.*

Seeking to Save.

Nowhere is the breadth and depth of Christ's message more strongly stated. He came to save that which was lost.

"Lost" is a lonely word and often used in describing Christ's mission. We think of it more in regard to the young and can imagine the terrible

strain which a child undergoes if, for any considerable period, it feels itself lost.

It is not so easy to visualize the condition of one who is lost in sin, but it is as pathetic. The wanderer sees no familiar signs, hears no friendly voice and sinks down at last in agony and despair.

It was to such that Christ came. He was not only to save them, but was to seek them that He might save them.

Salvation has not been placed at the end of an arduous search; Christ does not hide Himself in order to make one weary with hunting.

As the father went forward to meet the prodigal and forgave him at the very sight of repentance, so Christ is walking through the world today eager for opportunities to forgive.

No one is so poor as to be beneath His notice; no one is so rich as to be above His appeal. None is so ignorant that He cannot make him understand His message, and none is so learned as to be beyond the need of His atoning blood.

Completing the Circle.

The invitation to Zacchæus completes the circle of Christ's love.

We have seen Him healing the lepers and restoring steadiness to the palsied hand; we have seen Him giving sight to the blind and casting out evil spirits; but nearly all of the beneficiaries of His ministry were among the needy.

The poor had the Gospel preached to them and were blessed by His healing touch. The masses

followed Him and "*the common people heard Him gladly.*" He more than once rebuked the unworthy rich—Dives, who fared sumptuously every day and lavished money upon his dress, was pictured in torment, and the money-changers were driven from the Temple. In one of His most impressive parables He described the truth as being choked by the deceitfulness of riches.

All Alike Before God.

Those who give themselves stand alike before God in the sight of Christ. Neither riches nor poverty, neither learning nor ignorance can separate them; no ancestry, whether obscure or distinguished, can intrude inequality among those who first give their own selves.

Zacchæus felt highly honoured when Christ went to dine with him, and this distinction can be enjoyed by all who prize Christ's presence as Zacchæus did.

The Master is ready to brighten every home if the occupants are but willing—He came to "*seek and to save that which was lost.*" He can save to the uttermost, and His call is to all who labour and are heavy laden, and those who seek His face in humility and contriteness of spirit assuredly find rest unto their souls.

XXII

CHRIST AND SIMON THE PHARISEE

LUKE 7: 37-50

IN our study of Christ and His companions as they were related in various incidents of the Master's earthly life, we now come to a story of surpassing beauty, although it deals with sin and the sinner.

It is one that exhibits one of the wonderful attributes of the Saviour; namely, His ability to separate the sinner from his sin and to love the former while hating the latter.

During the second year of His ministry, Christ sat at meat in a Pharisee's house when "*a woman in the city*"—Luke describes her simply as a "sinner"—came to Jesus with an alabaster cruse of ointment. Let me quote the description of the scene as it is related in the seventh chapter of Luke's Gospel:

"*And stood at His feet behind Him weeping, and began to wash His feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed His feet, and anointed them with the ointment. Now when the Pharisee which had bidden Him saw it, he spake within himself, saying, This Man, if He were a prophet, would have known who and what*

manner of woman this is that toucheth Him: for she is a sinner."

Simon felt offended that such a woman—a sinner—should come into his house, and it raised suspicion as to Christ's power that He seemed not to perceive the kind of woman that she was.

The identity of this woman is not established with absolute certainty. John mentions Mary of Bethany in the description of a similar incident and the language of the two accounts is so much alike as to raise the presumption that it was the same Mary who sat under the spell of the words of the Master and left the serving to her sister.

But to return to Luke's narrative: Simon, in his protest, acted exactly like the Pharisee that he was. How could a woman like this have the courage to come into a house like his? And how could one who claimed to be a prophet allow such a woman to wash His feet with her tears and wipe them with the hairs of her head—and even kiss His feet and anoint them with ointment?

An Unequaled Rebuke.

Of all rebukes in history and literature few, if any, equal the one administered to this Pharisee by Jesus.

"Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee," said the Guest to His host.

"Master, say on," replied the Pharisee.

Then Christ put a question to him: If one debtor owed five hundred pence and another fifty and both were forgiven, which would love the lender most?

Simon, the Pharisee, did not seem to have been greatly impressed by the problem; he did not answer very heartily; there was even an air of flippancy in his reply. *"I suppose,"*—he did not care to announce any positive decision in so trivial a case —but he "supposed" that the one to whom the creditor forgave most would love most.

Then Christ turned to the woman, but speaking to Simon, said what might seem even rude where politeness is estimated more highly than truth.

"Seest thou this woman?" He said. *"I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet; but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. Thou gavest me no kiss; but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet. My head with oil thou didst not anoint; but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment."*

Christ's Scorn of Pharisaism.

How the eyes of Jesus must have pierced the Pharisee's heart as He held up before him the devotion of the woman and contrasted her attentions with the indifference of the Pharisee. Before saying to the woman, *"Thy sins are forgiven,"* He informed Simon that *"her sins, which are many, are forgiven,"* and then He applied the rule that He had forced Simon to admit to be just, *"For she loved much."*

And we must not overlook the philosophy embodied in the concluding clause of the verse, *"But to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little."*

Here we have Jesus, who came to be the propitiation for man's sins, announcing the possession of all power to forgive and the completeness of that forgiveness.

We have Pharisees today who think themselves sinless—who draw their cloaks close about them for fear they may be contaminated by a sinner.

They reject the idea that man ever fell, or *can* fall. They profess to believe that man has been improving throughout the ages and therefore needs no Saviour. Having no place in their philosophy for a fall, they recognize no need of salvation. They can see no blackness in sin. If man makes mistakes, they say we must not be too severe with him—just a little reprimand will be sufficient.

Such is the philosophy of those who today feel themselves superior to all who confess their sins and see in Christ their Saviour.

Man's Natural Tendency.

There is no subject upon which the Bible is more explicit than the subject of sin. A writer in a recent book declares that the Bible is the most hated book ever published, and he explains this hatred on the ground that the Bible is the only book that does not flatter man. It holds up before him a life-like picture of himself and declares him to be wicked and in need of a Saviour. This is a subject which every human being should study and upon which every one should have an opinion because it is a subject which concerns every one.

Is man's natural tendency downward or upward?

Who, if he examines himself and understands others, can doubt that it is downward? That invisible, intangible, eternal thing that we call life is in a constant struggle with the influences that would destroy the body.

From birth it is a fight against disease and lurking danger. Sometimes the spark of life is extinguished as the babe enters life; sometimes it is put out in infancy or youth; sometimes the battle continues until maturity is reached; sometimes all of life's foes are kept at bay until old age lowers the body's vitality and makes it the prey of some disease which would have been impotent when the pulse was full and the resisting power at its maximum.

The Need of a Spiritual Force.

But there is never a day when life can make a treaty of peace with hidden enemies or suspend its vigilance. Finally, either without notice or at the end of a siege of sickness, the surrender is announced and man drops back into the dust from which he sprang.

Drummond has used this gravitation toward the grave to illustrate the necessity for a lifting power. Just as the body needs life to keep it from yielding to an unrelenting force that pulls it downward toward the earth, so man needs a spiritual force from above to keep him from the grossest transgressions.

Look at the victims of sin.

One man is an athlete in frame, a scholar in training, and a saint in hopes and ideals; he falls a

victim to the appetite for drink. Watch him as he drops out of church, and then out of business, and then out of society and then into the grave. The mother who rejoiced at his birth and dreamed of great achievements in his youth sighs between her tears and feels relieved when the tragedy is ended.

Take one who has just as good a start, but who walks the road of immorality; his rotting flesh will at last disgrace a tomb. One cannot be born upon a plane so high that he cannot fall to the lowest depths of degradation.

And so with the gambler; he can become so diseased as to be indifferent to God's law of rewards which limits one's collections to his earnings and measures his earnings by the service which he renders.

Yet the god of drink, the god of passion, and the god of chance are but three of the many false gods which men worship.

There is the god of ease that those worship who think only of having a good time; the god of intellect that those worship who put the brain above the heart and the reason above faith; the travel god that those worship who yield to the wanderlust until the ordinary experiences of life become uninteresting to them; the god of fame that those worship who are willing to exchange everything for fleeting applause; the god of fashion that those worship who put social distinction above solid service to society; and the god of gold whose devotees find their hearts shriveling and their sympathies contracting because of their worship of money.

All these false gods have their worshippers; *and one and all are but deputies for the one supreme false god—self.*

The worship of self is the fundamental sin, black and degrading. It may not lead one to the violation of statute laws; it may simply make him as worthless to society as the brute—more worthless because he consumes, while the brute may yield its body to man for food.

An Awe-Inspiring Thought.

Until one is brought under conviction, he does not understand his need for forgiveness, but let him once see the carnal heart as it really is and he can understand how far man has fallen and how helpless man is without a Power from above to lift his load of guilt and lead him on the upward way.

Bible scholars have pointed out as evidence of the fall of man that the human being is the only creature that does not live up to its possibilities.

The horse, the cow, the sheep, the hog—all animals, domestic and wild—live upon the highest plane possible to them. There are no delinquents, no degenerates among the brutes—"only man is vile."

The difference between the value of the highest and the lowest of any given species is not great, but consider the infinitude of space that separates man at his best from man at his worst. At his best, man is but a "*little lower than the angels,*" while man at his worst may, in some respects, be lower than the beasts about him. And—awe-inspiring thought

—every human being is travelling in one direction or the other, upward toward the highest plane to which man can aspire or downward toward the lowest level toward which man can fall!

Christ has power to rescue man at any point on the downward way and, by forgiveness, start him on his ascent toward the skies.

"Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life."

XXIII

CHRIST AT THE LAST SUPPER

Luke 22: 14-23

THE commemoration of The Last Supper which, prior to His crucifixion, Jesus sat down to, in company with His twelve first followers, has become a holy sacrament of the Church—and the most beautiful custom that has ever been observed by man.

It had its prototype in the Jewish Feast of the Passover, but differs from it in many ways. The Jewish feast was observed for seventeen hundred years as an expression of gratitude for the deliverance of the Israelites from Egyptian bondage. Christ kept this Passover feast from His youth.

The plan of redemption was arranged in the beginning—"*from the foundation of the world*"—and was carried out perfectly in every detail. In the Scriptures we have studied together, we have seen how Christ, conscious at all times of the work that He had come to perform and of the way in which it was to be performed, faced the ordeal with perfect calmness.

During the early part of His ministry, He endeavoured to avoid publicity lest His work might

be cut short before He had completed His instruction to His disciples. But when all was ready, He deliberately took up His journey to Jerusalem and permitted the demonstration that, as He expected, provoked the fatal attack upon His life. He selected the day set apart for the Feast of the Passover to partake of His farewell meal with the Twelve whom He had selected and commissioned to carry on His work.

The Two Messengers.

As on the day of His triumphal entry into Jerusalem, He sent messengers ahead to execute His plans. At this time Peter and John were chosen and directed as to how they should select the room in which to prepare the feast. They would find a man carrying a pitcher of water.

This might seem rather an indefinite identification, since on this particular day the water for the Passover feast was carried by men instead of by women, and there were doubtless many men going on similar errands at this hour. But the same power that enabled Jesus to foresee and foretell the particular man who should direct them, brought them to this particular man and, following him, they found the room that Christ had selected for the Last Supper.

There has been considerable conjecture as to the home of which this room was a part. Some have thought it to have been the house of Mark's father; at any rate, it was the dwelling place of some one friendly to the Messiah and therefore willing that

He should observe the Passover there with His disciples.

It was an occasion destined to be forever memorable in the history of the Church and the supreme moment in the lives of those who were present.

A Supreme Moment.

Here were the chosen vessels into which Christ had been pouring His spirit—instruments through which He was to transform the world. What a vision the Saviour had of the gigantic task which He entrusted to these plain men, called from the ordinary labours of that day! Thrones were to be overturned; governments were to be set up; old customs were to be discarded and a new era ushered in; and this was to be done by One who had "*not where to lay His head,*" acting through a group of beings seemingly as impotent as He appeared to be!

They had been persecuted in many places and hunted by those who sought their lives. What sublime faith it required to enable even the Son of God to look through the agonies of the Cross and the veil of blood, shed for the remission of sins, and behold the glory of the Resurrection and the unfolding history of the centuries to follow!

He invited these "friends"—in the fifteenth verse of the fifteenth chapter of John He explained to them why He would call them not servants, but friends—to gather about the table with Him and solemnize the last breaking of bread.

There was no formality save the prayer that always preceded the meal. He was one among them, and the humblest of the group—Lord of lords and King of kings, and yet suggesting no thought of superiority.

No Formality.

On the contrary, we are told that He washed the feet of His disciples when they had neglected this formality. He came from the throne of God, took upon Him human form and was about to return to the Father, but He was the modest host setting an example of service.

He frankly confessed to them that He had looked forward with eager anticipation to this hour: "*With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer,*" adding, that it was the last "*until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God.*"

He took the bread and, after giving thanks, brake it and gave it to them, saying, "*This is My body which is given for you.*"

He brings vividly before them the sacrifice which He is about to make; His body was to be broken for them and for all mankind, for all who are willing to accept Him as their Redeemer.

This Simple Origin of the Sacrament.

And the cup was likewise passed, christened as "*the new testament in My blood, which is shed for you.*" The supper was to be observed in memory of Him. The old Passover feast commemorated the saving of the firstborn of the Israelites when

the angel of death visited the homes that had not been marked with the blood of a lamb; the Last Supper was to commemorate the saving of a world by the blood of the Redeemer.

From this simple beginning, the observance of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper has spread until hundreds of millions meet at stated intervals and partake together of the bread and of the cup. While every Christian should at all times be mindful of the sacrifice made by Christ and of the service that He rendered, contemplation of these things is more serious and earnest as one partakes of the emblems representing the broken body and the shed blood.

The Need for To-day.

The need for these days does not decrease with the passing years; man's nature has not changed.

Human institutions do not purge man of His inborn tendency to sin; civilization, notwithstanding its many advantages, increases rather than decreases the opportunities for wrong doing and adds strength to the temptations that were hard enough to resist in olden times.

While opportunities for service have been multiplied by improved means of communication, opportunities to do wrong have been increased in the same ratio. Even education, when turned to crime, makes the sinner more powerful for harm. The moral rudder must be enlarged to suit the size of the intellectual ship or the risks of disaster are multiplied.

There is no morality except that which rests upon religion. We can hardly count one moral who abstains from injuring others merely for fear of being punished. Respect for others' rights must come from within if it is to be effective in producing righteous conduct; love is infinitely more coercive than mere respect for others' rights.

The Partaking of the Sacrament.

When the Christian partakes of the Sacrament, he is distressed if his memory chide him with crucifying Christ afresh; he prays for forgiveness, with the comforting assurance that true repentance meets God's requirements.

Like the prodigal son, he finds the Father not only willing but anxious to forgive, and the relief that he finds in the sense of freedom from the burden that he has borne leads him to pray that he may live more worthily in the future.

When we realize the shortcomings even of those who avail themselves of the searching experiences that accompany the taking of the Sacrament, we wonder at the indifference—even the pride and self-confidence—of those who rely upon their own strength to withstand the ovrepowering temptations that meet us at every step. *"If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?"*

There is one verse of this passage (v. 22) which contains a thought that deserves more than a passing notice. The fact that Christ's death was an indispensable part of the plan of salvation—"*and*

truly the Son of Man goeth, as it was determined" —did not excuse Judas for his part in the carrying out of the plan. Having received the blood money, Judas could not count himself a divine instrument employed for the effecting of a world's redemption. Good often comes out of evil, but the men who do the evil are judged according to the character of their conduct and not according to the results that come in spite of them.

The Betrayer's Part.

"Woe unto that man by whom He [Christ] is betrayed" is the condemnation passed upon all who do wrong even when God uses the wrong for the carrying out of His plan. *"The wrath of man shall praise Thee";* God makes the sins of men, even so deep-dyed a sin as that of Judas, to praise Him.

The experience of Judas is characteristic of the criminal. He is sometimes overcome by remorse and seeks death as a relief from the burden that he is carrying. Christians should consider to what extent the guilt of Judas is shared by those who, while professing the Name of Christ, betray Him by lives inconsistent with the teachings of the Saviour.

A Great Moral Truth.

This chapter in Luke's Gospel contains the record of other incidents which have vitally affected the course of Christianity. Not least among these is the use Christ made of a manifestation of selfish

ambition among some of the Twelve, as to "*which of them should be accounted the greatest.*" A grievous fault opened the way for the enunciation of one of the greatest moral truths bequeathed by Jesus unto men. "*Let him that is chief be as he that doth serve,*" as the Revised Version has it. Christ emphasized this by declaring, "*I am among you as he that serveth.*"

Service is the measure of greatness, and it is the measure, also, of happiness. God has linked our happiness to our virtue and our prosperity to our righteousness. Christ, in revealing God to man, revealed the law of service by which one can achieve greatness and secure happiness.

The thoughts aroused by partaking of the Lord's Supper elevate us, enlarge our vision, add to our strength, ennoble our purpose, multiply our service, and increase the joy that we find in Christian living.

XXIV

CHRIST AND THE THREE IN GETHSEMANE

MARK 14: 32-42; LUKE 22: 39-48, 54

ONE of the most fascinating and impressive pictures of Jesus is Hoffman's "Christ in Gethsemane," to which event in Luke's account of the life of our Saviour we are now come.

Kneeling by the side of a stone, the Messiah lifts His heart in prayer to the Father as He draws near to the great sacrifice for which He came and the approach of which He had revealed to His disciples.

Next to the scene upon the Cross, nothing grips the Christian so strongly as the agony through which the Saviour passed in the Garden of Gethsemane.

We see here more clearly than anywhere else, except in the hour of His crucifixion, the commingling of the human and the Divine.

The Master's flesh shrinks, as all flesh does, from pain, and the sense of physical suffering is deepened by the seeming failure of His mission. "*He came unto His own and His own received Him not.*"

Even His disciples, who caught occasional glimpses of the Divine side of His personality,

could not comprehend the magnitude of His plan of salvation, while others to whom He offered the unspeakable honour of comradeship, hissed and jeered and refused.

The Endorsement of Prayer.

At every moment of His ministry upon earth His words were watched that they might be turned into accusations against Him; and now He passes through these hours of sorrow on the way to His seat at the right hand of God.

As was His custom, He went unto the Mount of Olives and His disciples followed Him. He enjoined them to pray that they enter not into temptation, and then He went apart from them and poured forth His heart in petition to God.

Here we have the highest testimonial ever given to prayer. The second part of the Trinity—He who was Himself one with God—gave solemn endorsement to communion with the Heavenly Father through prayer.

Peter, James and John, the three who witnessed the Transfiguration, were selected from the eleven (Judas having departed on his evil mission) to go with Jesus as He went aside to pray. There can be no doubt that the Master was partial to these three men for reasons that have been suggested in previous chapters. Peter was to be the leader of the group and needed the benefit of this intimate association with Christ. John, as we have seen, entered more into spiritual communion with the Saviour than the writers of the other Gospels.

The anguish of Jesus is strongly brought out. His first sentence, "*My soul is exceeding sorrowful unto death,*" gives the maximum of emphasis. It was a *soul* sorrow—the soul was *exceeding* sorrowful—sorrowful even unto *death.* After He had separated the three from the remainder of the Apostles, He separated Himself from these and, going "*forward a little,*" "*fell on the ground*" and prayed that if it were possible the hour might pass away from Him.

The Great Ordeal.

Only a little while before, in His intercessory prayer, He had described the atonement which He came to make for the sins of the world. He affirmed that He had been with the Father even before the world was and that He had been sent by the Father on this very mission, every detail of which was known to Him in advance.

He had discussed with Moses and Elijah, on the Mount of Transfiguration, the death which He was about to "*accomplish at Jerusalem.*" He knew that Judas was to betray Him and He knew just the form of death which He was to die.

Never before had there been the slightest trace of wavering, and yet here He earnestly prayed that the cup might be removed from Him. His appeal to the Father was coupled with the suggestion that all things were possible with God. This, I repeat, is so out of harmony with all that had gone before and with that which followed that it could not have been imagined or supposed.

There is no explanation suggested; it is a simple narrative of what occurred. The disciples giving us their accounts of their Lord and Master in Gethsemane evidently did not feel that the truth needed any explanation or defense. There is no indication that they anticipated any such confusion as that which has existed among those who have commented upon it.

Christ's Sacrifice.

The scene in Gethsemane is one of the most conclusive and convincing incidents in the whole life of Christ. It is hard for the average person to comprehend the blackness of sin; the finite mind cannot conceive of the abhorrence of sin felt by a righteous God. That man should voluntarily transgress the laws of God seems impossible when we consider the magnificence of the rewards that go with righteousness and the awfulness of the punishments that are inseparable from sin—"*the wages of sin is death.*" It requires just such a light as Luke throws upon the subject to enable us to measure the vastness of the Heavenly Father's love and the majesty of the sacrifice made by the Son.

Jesus, Himself innocent of all transgression, took upon Himself the form of a man and, "*being tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin,*" offered Himself as a substitute for man.

Coming to earth to render this service indescribably great, He found not only indifference among those who ought to have been prompt to accept

Him, but among many bitter hostility—*"He came unto His own and His own received Him not."*

The high priests whom He had been taught to respect, sought His life. Coming with a priceless salvation and strewing heavenly wisdom as the sower scatters seed, He saw little evidence of the accomplishment of a great change. And now He was about to die a cruel death to save those who had been guilty of base ingratitude.

His soul needed to be strengthened by a draught straight from the fountain source of all power, and His prayer was answered. He marched with unfaltering step into the embrace of His betrayer, into the arms of His enemies, to an unfair trial, to a cruel cross and to a lonely sepulchre.

His Disciples Fail Him.

Finding His disciples fallen asleep while He prayed, Jesus said, *"The spirit truly is ready, but the flesh is weak."* It may have been that the human side of the Saviour shrank from the physical suffering that awaited Him, while the God-side bravely faced His sublime task. But it must be remembered that His pathetic appeal for a release was accompanied by that wonderful expression of submission so often used as a conclusion for prayers: *"Nevertheless not what I will, but what thou wilt."* Luke, in quoting the language of Christ, gives us the words more commonly used, *"Not My will, but Thine, be done."*

At the conclusion of the third prayer, He came back in a different mood. When He returned the

first time, He inquired of His sleepy disciples, *"Couldst not thou watch one hour?"* He upbraided them a second time when He found them sleeping; *"Neither wist they what to answer Him."* But when He had finished His communion with the Father, He was indifferent to their lack of vigilance. *"Sleep on now,"* He said, *"and take your rest: it is enough, the hour is come. . . . Rise up, let us go; lo, he that betrayeth me is at hand."*

And may not a lesson be drawn from the drowsiness of His disciples?

Even the three from whom He might expect most sympathy were asleep. If these highly favoured companions could sleep while their Master passed through these agonizing hours, it is not strange that there should be so little sympathy manifested by ordinary mortals toward those who are related to them only by that primal tie that binds each human being to every other. We all need sympathising friends; no life is entirely free from the bitter days when griefs seem greater than can be borne. And yet, how small each one's circle of those who are deeply concerned and share sorrow!

The gay will laugh when thou art gone,
The solemn brood of care plod on.
And each one, as before, will chase
His favourite phantom!

But the Master felt another need of prayer, a need of strength to pass through the ordeal toward

which He had been journeying and for which He waited. It was not fear that moved Him; it was the human side of Christ that asked the Father, "*If Thou be willing, remove this cup from Me,*" but it was the deity in Christ that added, "*nevertheless, not My will, but Thine, be done.*"

Ministering Angels.

And as Jesus prayed there appeared unto Him an angel from heaven to strengthen Him, just as in the days before and since an all-loving Heavenly Father has sent winged messengers unto His children to be allies when the night is darkest and the fight is hottest.

As Elisha drew back the curtain that his frightened servant might behold the heavenly reinforcements camped upon the mountain top, so Luke records for us the appearance of an angel that brought strength in answer to a prayer uttered so earnestly that His sweat "*was as it were great drops of blood.*"

When Christ arose, He was ready for the final ordeal. His flesh had been brought into subjection to the spirit and He who might have called legions to His defense meekly gave Himself into the hands of His executioners.

Defending Prayer.

And now, let us turn to note the reason for prayer which Jesus in this grave hour gave to His disciples. For Himself, He prayed, "*Father, if Thou be willing, remove this cup from Me: never-*

theless not My will, but Thine be done." To His disciples He said: *"Pray, that ye enter not into temptation."*

Who, considering the experience of that sorrowful night, will say that there is no need for prayer? If those whom Christ Himself chose—who enjoyed daily companionship with Him and were inspired by His presence and His words—if they needed to pray that they enter not into temptation, who of us can be so foolhardy as to think himself fully fortified against the tempter?

It is just such over-confidence that invites Satan to try his power on man. When one is in the attitude of prayer he makes his strongest resistence to the wiles of the evil one.

Christ taught His followers to beware of the beginnings of evil. His philosophy of life was sound and it has, therefore, endured and will endure.

Just as no human strength is sufficient to save one who goes near enough to the falls of Niagara to be caught in the current, so human strength is not sufficient to withstand temptations when one toys with sin. Three illustrations will suffice.

The Beginning of Sin.

Tolstoy says that if one would understand the life of a murderer one must not begin one's examination at the time the murder is committed, but should go back to the point where the criminal first deliberately suppressed his conscience and did that which he knew to be wrong. That was the begin-

ning; after that he was weaker and still weaker until finally he yielded to the temptation to take a human life either out of revenge or for some other motive.

One who cherishes the thought of killing is in his heart a murderer even though fear of detection may restrain him from striking the fatal blow. The desire to kill must be strangled at its inception.

Christ has pointed the way in the teaching of love and forgiveness. We are to love our enemies —this is the cure for revenge. We are to forgive— this restores broken friendships and makes neighbourliness possible.

Then there is the temptation to steal—not merely the common forms of theft such as larceny, burglary and highway robbery—the punishment for these is assured—but the more refined forms of stealing, such as embezzlement and exploitation.

To the average man old-fashioned stealing is no temptation; he would be indignant at the very suggestion that he would pick your pocket or enter into your house, day or night, and appropriate money or property. And yet, embezzlement by trustees is not so unusual among so-called respectable men.

A bank official who divides his time between reading the stock market reports and the counting of money has to meet a temptation that does not come to mankind in general. It seems so easy to use just a little of the money of which he is the custodian, and he is so sure that he can make a profit within a day or two and replace the money. Nobody need know of the temporary use of the

deposit and he will soon have money of his own with which to lay the foundation of a fortune secured by speculation. It is a plausible argument for one whose conscience is not sensitive.

This temptation has overcome the scruples of a multitude of men—and then the community is shocked at an arrest or suicide when the discovery is made.

Only a few years ago the head of one of the oldest and most trusted banks in New York died and investigation disclosed that he had been committing frauds on the bank for a decade.

The Unfailing Remedy.

What is the remedy? Christ supplies it. He cleanses the heart; He purges it of the love of money which *"is the root of all evil,"* or, as the new version puts it, *"a root of every kind of evil."*

And what of the infidelity that wrecks homes, ruins lives, and does injustice to so many children?

What is the trouble? Dallying with sin, gradual yielding until the temptation becomes a consuming flame.

What is the remedy? Here again Christ supplies it. He warns against the thought before it ripens into act. Here, too, the beginning of evil must be avoided.

And so with every sin. But care in the avoiding of temptation is not sufficient; those who are conscious of human weakness and anxious to abstain from wrongdoing will pray as Christ advised His

disciples to do, that they enter not into temptation. We must pray as well as watch.

In conclusion: The Bible tells us specially of two gardens,—the Garden of Eden in which man sinned and fell, and the Garden of Gethsemane which witnessed the agony of the "last Adam" in whose death man finds atonement for sin.

In the very beginning of the race there was a conflict between the heart and the head, between faith that finds its expression in obedience, and the so-called reason which asks, "Why?"

Faith is necessary because it is as impossible for the Heavenly Father to explain all His plans to His children as it is for an earthly Father to explain everything to his children. The difference between the comprehension of the Heavenly Father and that of His grown-up children is infinitely greater than the difference between the comprehension of earthly parents and that of their children when they reach inquiring age.

The same conflict is raging today—the same controversy as to which shall occupy the throne. Faith, that extension of man's spiritual perception that takes hold on the verities that elude the grasp of the mind, is ever ready to conduct man to the heights, while reason is still beguiling man to tarry in the valley. But all who are desirous of attaining the uplands will find in the lessons of Gethsemane an incentive to leave behind and below them the sin committed in Eden.

XXV

CHRIST ON CALVARY

LUKE 23: 32-46; JOHN 19: 17-27

THE primary purpose of the content of this book is to keep in view Christ in definite relation with His first followers. To separate this aspect of the Master's life from the incidents of His public ministry is an impossible task. But as far as possible, the incidents dealt with are those of a personal nature.

We have come now, however, to a point where Jesus has no companions and no friends standing by His side. Through all the brutalities and insults which were heaped upon Him before Annas and Caiaphas and Pilate, He stood—alone. But at Golgotha, there were at least four—one man and three women—who *"stood by the Cross."* To be sure, they could do naught to help Jesus. He was beyond all human aid. Yet the fact of their presence enables us to bring within the province of this volume the scene which could not well have been left out in any case—the awful scene on Calvary.

"And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified Him, and the

malefactors, one on the right hand, and the other on the left." Thus does Luke begin his account of the Crucifixion.

The exact place described as Calvary, Golgotha or The Skull is not known. Some who visit the Holy Land allow the disappointment in regard to the identification of the important places to cast a cloud over their pilgrimage. Such should never be the case. While it would be more satisfactory to have universal agreement as to where the important events took place, still all is sacred ground. Jerusalem is the Holy City. Its streets were trod by the mighty men and women of Israel in the height of their glory and strength.

Here, too, in striking contrast with the regal splendour of Jewish rulers, walked Christ, called, in derision, the King of the Jews. Here He taught and here He healed the sick and pardoned sin. The memory of these hallowed places thrills the worshipper who has been drawn to Palestine by a heartfelt interest in the religion that had its birth there.

Luke's Narrative of Calvary.

Many and striking are the lessons we may gather from Luke's narrative, but we can only touch, here, on what appears to be the most important of them. First, we have that wonderful prayer of Jesus, His initial utterance after being nailed to the Cross: *"Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."*

Of all the prayers that Christ uttered while on

earth, this one gives us the best mirror of His soul. Forgiveness is the most distinguishing feature of the teachings of Christ when we compare His words with the words of the best of human teachers.

The same idea is embodied in the Lord's Prayer, but that was framed when Christ was calm. The same thought animates His language when He extends the limit of forgiveness until its far-flung line takes in the enemy as well as the friend—but this, too, was uttered when the body was free from pain.

The prayer that issued from the Cross breathed forth in the hour of deepest agony the infinite love that could not be abated by the wickedness of His persecutors, even when they visited upon His body the maximum of suffering. His example backed up His precepts; He acted upon the advice which He gave and did so under circumstances more difficult than His followers have to face.

"They Know Not What They Do."

The reason which Christ gave for this prayer for forgiveness furnishes one of the most practical lessons to be drawn from the Bible; namely, *"They know not what they do."*

Ignorance as an excuse for wrong doing is not sufficiently emphasized. We are too prone to assume the worst reason rather than to judge with charity.

We take it for granted, often without investigation, especially if it is against us, that the offence

is deliberate and that the intention of the wrong doer is indefensible and inexcusable.

We may even pride ourselves upon rendering a public service in exposing the acts of others, when a knowledge of the facts might make us more charitable, or when reformation might be easier if more considerate treatment were tried.

A newspaper writer once sought answers to the question, "What would be the result if for one day all spoke the truth about each other?"

"What do you mean by the truth?" asked one of whom an answer was sought.

"What they know about each other, of course," was the reply.

"Well," remarked the person interviewed, "in the first place, probably not half that we think we know is actually true, and much of that which is true should not be told."

"Go, and Sin No More."

If one who has sinned, repents and reforms, what public benefit is to be gained by exposure just for the sake of circulating sensational news? When Christ wrote upon the ground and, by His questions, confused the accusers of a sinful woman, He did not condone sin; He cured it. "*Go, and sin no more,*" is a Christlike expression.

Those who clamoured for the blood of the Saviour did not comprehend His supernatural character or the majesty of His mission; they regarded Him as one of their own flesh and blood whose life could be extinguished by human hands and who

could be imprisoned in a man-made sepulchre. If they could have looked in upon His stainless heart; if they could have caught the significance of His mission among men; if they could have pierced the veil that concealed the future from their gaze and beheld Him triumph over the grave; if they could have measured His increasing power throughout the centuries, they, too, would have fallen on their faces before Him, crying, "*My Lord and my God.*"

No Blood on Jesus' Hands.

If only this prayer had been adopted and its spirit followed by all who have taken upon themselves the name of Christ, how different would have been the course of history. Nothing that Jesus said can be quoted in justification of the cruelties that have been practised in the name of Christianity. No blood can be found upon His hands.

The effort to abolish war is one of the large ways in which men are striving to mould the world according to the last prayer of the Saviour. Reason is to be substituted for force; investigation is to take the place of violence, and understanding the place of disputes and disagreement. "*Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do*" is more compelling than ultimatums, more persuasive than sword or shell.

This is profound philosophy and it has a very broad application. It is really the secret of every great success. One who thinks only of himself, or

first of himself, cannot accomplish much, while devotion to things larger than one's self yields rewards incalculable.

Wendell Phillips put the same thought into language, only a little different, when he said, "How prudently most men sink into nameless graves, while now and then a few forget themselves into immortality." It is the same thought; there is a greater virtue than prudence—it is entire forgetfulness of self when some large work is to be done.

The soldier who dies for a cause gives us the most familiar illustration of one's ability to earn a reward by dying, but in the day when swords shall be beaten into plowshares it will be glorious to live for one's country, and to live for one's country may require as high an order of courage as those exhibit who die for their country.

"Himself He Cannot Save!"

But we must pass on. Luke says: "*And the people stood beholding. And the rulers also with them derided Him, saying, He saved others; let Him save Himself.*" Matthew and Mark record the chief priests as saying, "*Himself He cannot save.*"

To those who did not understand Christ's philosophy that seemed like a plausible rebuke. Counting self as the center, they reasoned that, if Christ could save others He could, of course, first save Himself.

It never occurred to them that One who came

to seek and to save the world must necessarily neglect Himself. His life was the price of our salvation—by His stripes we are healed.

Those who mocked had not caught the spirit of Jesus; they regarded Him as a pretender, an aspirant for an earthly throne who did not manifest the ambition of a king or have the following to compel obedience to His will.

Their language betrayed their low conception of life. To them, the saving of one's self was more important than the saving of others. The fact that He saved others was recognised; the fact that He did not, or as they thought, could not, save Himself excited their derision. At this point, Christ's teachings rise far above the teachings of the uninspired.

Saving by Sacrificing.

And yet, at no point is the superiority of Christ's philosophy more clearly demonstrated. "*Whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for My sake shall find it.*"

Paradoxical as it may seem, those who think only of their own lives and avoid the sacrifices that duty calls for lead very little lives, while those who give themselves for causes greater than themselves find a much larger life than that which they are willing to surrender.

The example of self-sacrifice, self-forgetfulness and self-abnegation which Christ set on Calvary, has been emulated by thousands since that awe-inspiring hour.

I recall a visit to a friend some years ago. He told me of a bitter disappointment that had recently come into his life.

He had sent his son through college and then to a medical school. When the young man was ready to enter his profession the father laid before him a plan. He offered to build him a hospital and equip it with every modern appliance.

To his surprise, the boy answered: "But, father, I want to be a medical missionary."

The parent made his plan as alluring as he could and reminded his son that many could go as medical missionaries while few were able to begin practice under such favourable conditions as he.

Again the son repeated: "But, father, I want to be a medical missionary."

There were tears in the voice of my friend as he asked me, "What could I do?"

There was nothing that he *could* do. The boy had caught the inspiration that comes from Calvary and was too intent upon saving others to plan for himself alone.

Between Two Thieves.

The hanging of two malefactors, one on each side of Him, was intended as the most stinging insult possible to the Messiah. It was the last opportunity His persecutors had to exhibit their malignant hatred. But, as darkness brings out the stars, the very blackness of their crime brought into brighter light the spirit with which Jesus bore the indignities that they put upon Him.

One of the malefactors displayed a spirit at one with that shown by the rulers and the soldiers and "railed on Him, saying, '*If Thou be the Christ, save Thyself and us.*'" But the other rebuked Him saying that they, the thieves, suffered justly, "*for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this man hath done nothing amiss.*"

Then, addressing Jesus, he pleaded. "*Remember me when Thou comest into thy kingdom.*" To which our Lord replied, "*Today shalt thou be with Me in paradise.*"

The forgiveness of the thief upon the Cross brings us to a much disputed point: Can eleventh hour repentance be trusted? Yes, if the Bible can be trusted. The doctrine is stated as clearly and unequivocally as any other doctrine. Yet the possibility of salvation at the very moment of dissolution is questioned by those who reject Christianity; it is questioned by those who believe that God must be approached by slow degrees. But Christ's teachings are replete with proof that the forgiveness of sin can be instantaneous, and forgiveness would be of little value if it did not bring with it release from sin, however great and for however long a period.

The Impossible Not Required.

If one lives after he is forgiven, he is expected to bring forth works meet for repentance, but this is impossible when death follows immediately, and God does not require the impossible.

Man may sometimes doubt the sincerity of one who professes repentance in the presence of death,

but Christ could look into the heart of His companion in suffering and see there the genuine suffering that justifies the washing of one's sins away.

And we must not overlook the fact that the thief upon the Cross had given all the proof within his power.

While the other robber joined the rulers in scoffing, this one dared to take the side of the crucified Christ, and not only defended the Saviour, but recognising His Messiahship, begged not to be forgotten by Him.

Even a hardhearted man would have been touched by such a faith; how could Christ be unmoved?

It is one of the chief merits of Christianity that it offers pardon up to the last moment. Christ's salvation is for *all,* from *every* sin, throughout every *moment* of man's sojourn upon the earth.

Christ's Last Words Form the Laws.

The words which form Christ's last utterance from the Cross has made an indelible impression upon the Christian world.

"Father, into thy hands I commend My spirit," has been embodied in innumerable wills. And what more fitting language can be found as one contemplates the closing of this earthly life and entrance into the life beyond.

It is this "vital spark," this "heavenly flame," which defies the tomb. From the Father it came and unto the Father it returns. His children bow in reverent submission to the Almighty's will, as

they enter that narrow, starlit strip that separates the days of our brief pilgrimage on earth from our eternal abode in the mansions that Christ has gone to prepare.

The Cross Still Stands!

And what, in a final word, shall we say of the death of Christ?

The crime committed against the Saviour was so deep-hued that the land was darkened for the space of three hours. The light of the sun was shut out and the veil of the Temple was rent in twain, but the light from that bloodstained Cross has been shining ever since and it will never be dimmed.

"*It is finished.*" The work which Christ came to do on earth was completed and He commended His spirit to the Father, from whom He came and unto whom He returned.

He was "the pivot upon which the ages turned." He was the fact to which a chosen people looked forward for many centuries and to which an increasing multitude look back as the greatest fact in history.

And today, suffering, not selfishness, moves the world; sacrifice, willingly endured for others, has a potency of which force and violence cannot boast.

Thus the Cross still stands—an infinite love, expressed in measureless sacrifice, and glorified by forgiveness that knows no bounds.

XXVI

CHRIST RISEN!

John 20: 1-16

THE Resurrection of Jesus Christ is the chief foundation stone of the Christian Church; if it were removed, the entire fabric would crumble.

It was the Resurrection that, by confirming what Christ had said, revealed to His followers the full meaning of the plan of salvation which they had but dimly comprehended.

In spite of all that He had said, in spite of all that He had done, in spite of all that He Himself was to them, they did not grasp the largeness of His mission or the sublimity of His sacrifice until He rose from the grave. His Resurrection surprised them almost as much as it surprised the Roman soldiers who stood guard to prevent His body being taken from the tomb.

Let us look first, however, at the fact of the Resurrection. We have a description of it in the Gospels by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Some people have given as a reason for questioning the Virgin Birth of Christ the fact that it is mentioned by only Matthew and Luke, although they are the only evangelists who make any reference whatever

to the birth of Christ. With what consistency can they dispute the Resurrection, which is recorded without any uncertainty or ambiguity in *all* the Gospels?

In John's Gospel—written by the man who was the second to visit the empty tomb—we read that "*The first day of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early, when it was yet dark, unto the sepulchre.*" The other evangelists speak of Mary, the mother of James, the less; Salome, the mother of James, the greater; and John, and Joanna, the wife of Chuza. But John mentions only Mary Magdalene, who carried the news of the Resurrection to the disciples.

Peter and John Hurry to the Empty Tomb.

When Peter and John ("the other disciple") heard the story which Mary excitedly told, they ran together to the sepulchre. John, being the younger man, quite naturally outstripped Peter, who was farther advanced in years, and came first to the tomb, but he did not enter. When Peter caught up with him, he entered in. John, the narrator of this account, followed Peter. His report of his own words is proof that he, as well as Peter, was sceptical in regard to the reported Resurrection—"*as yet they knew not the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead.*"

If Peter, the leader of the twelve, and John, who is described as "the beloved," did not yet understand in regard to the Resurrection, the others, of course, did not. The verse which describes the dis-

ciples as going away again unto their own home removes all doubt on this subject. They were convinced of His disappearance; their visit to the tomb had confirmed the report that Mary had brought to them, but as they did not expect Him to rise from the dead, they seem to have accepted the situation and were ready to return to the occupations from which they had been called.

Mary Abundantly Rewarded.

"But Mary stood without at the sepulchre weeping." Woman, last to leave the Cross, and first to visit the tomb, still lingered by the empty sepulchre! And the woman was abundantly rewarded.

"As she wept, she stooped down, and looked into the sepulchre, and seeth two angels in white." To their question, *"Woman, why weepest thou?"* she answered, *"Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him"* —words that have burned their way into the heart of the Christian world.

When she turned back, Jesus was standing near and she knew Him not. Whether her vision was dimmed by tears or whether His sudden appearance disconcerted her because it was so unexpected, or whether the appearance of Christ was somewhat different from that to which she was accustomed, is a matter of conjecture.

She, mistaking the Master for the gardener, appealed to him to inform her whether he had borne Him hence and, if so, to tell her where he had laid Him, that she might take Him away. But it needed

only the voice of Jesus to enable her to identify Him. He said to her, "Mary."

The Risen Christ's First Word.

The first word that the risen Christ uttered was that favourite name among women, the name of His mother, a name that has been often repeated during the generations that have followed and is largely employed today. No wonder it is popular; it is not only sweet to the ear, but it recalls the most "blessed among women"—the one chosen to be the mother of God incarnate, the name borne by the one who first discovered that the tomb was empty, and the first word uttered by the Saviour after He had paid the debt due to man's last enemy, death, and before He had ascended unto the Father.

Mary exclaimed, "Rabboni!" which is the Hebrew word for Master. It was also Mary who carried the first message sent by the Saviour to His Disciples: "*Go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend to my Father and your Father; and to my God, and your God.*"

John's Detailed Story.

None who read John's description can fail to note and recognise the minute detail he employs in his description of the Resurrection.

Mary, he tells us, came to the tomb on the first day of the week, not only *early* but "*when it was yet dark.*" When she saw that the stone had been taken away, she went at once to report her discovery and, in going, *ran.* Peter and John are also

described as *running,* and in the race John outstripped Peter.

Though John arrived first at the tomb, *he did not enter,* while Peter entered *as soon as he arrived* and found the linen clothes that were, according to custom, used in burying the dead. But attention is called to the fact that the napkin which had been upon His head was *not with the linen clothes* that had enshrouded the body, but was *rolled up in a place by itself.*

Then John describes his own entrance into the tomb and records the fact that both he and Peter failed to understand Christ's prophecy in regard to His resurrection. They not only had not expected Him to rise, but it did not occur to them that Christ was risen even after they found the tomb empty.

An Eye-Witness.

So, in the record of Mary meeting with Christ; she was *weeping* at the tomb after the disciples had returned to their home and she *stooped* and *looked into the tomb.* The exact position of the angels is given; *one was at the head and the other at the foot of the place where the body had lain.* And so her every movement is minutely described. She *turned herself* back and beheld Christ and mistook Him for the gardener. When Christ addressed her, she turned toward Him and recognized Him!

John could not have been mistaken, for he was an eye witness of much that he recorded and had direct from others that which he reported them as saying. His words must be true or deliberately

false. It is interesting to note that the word "infallible" is used but once in the entire Bible and then it is employed by Luke, who, in recording the Acts of the Apostles, says, *"To whom also He showed Himself alive after His passion by many infallible proofs."*

"They Have Taken Away My Lord."

I cannot refrain from directing special attention to the pathetic exclamation of Mary: *"They have taken away my Lord and I know not where they have laid Him."*

There are few expressions of grief in all literature more touching than hers. It recalls the sad lament of David when he learned of the death of Absalom; but David's sorrow welled up from the heart of a father whose love for his son was so great that even his rebellion against the father could not extinguish it.

Here was a grateful soul who had become a follower of the Saviour because she had been blest by His power to heal diseases of mind and body—and here devotion had been constant. Her heart had been wrung by His sufferings upon the Cross and now when her affection was finding expression in the custom of that day she finds the tomb empty. Not yet understanding the Saviour's victory over death, she supposed the body had been removed.

But her distress was soon turned to joy, for to her was reserved the happiness of being the first to greet the risen Lord.

The fact that she did not recognise Jesus when she first beheld Him might be taken as evidence that some change had taken place in His appearance, but more likely, knowing Him to be crucified and buried, it did not occur to her that the One upon whom she looked could be the One for whom she was mourning. But when Jesus uttered her name, she recognized Him at once.

She was not permitted to touch Him; He restrained her, saying, "*I am not yet ascended to my Father;*" and then He sent her to tell the brethren a message which she hastened to carry. Then follows the account of Peter running to the sepulchre and the various appearings of Christ recorded in the Gospels.

Can We Be Indifferent?

While that which she mourned as a loss unbearable was, in fact, a glorification surpassing in its magnificence and its sublimity the power of words to describe, Mary's language was a noble expression of a soul's anguish. The body which had encased the spirit of the Master had disappeared and she knew not where it could be found. The words contain a very practical thought for all of us at this very time.

If the cold and lifeless clay which had once been the habitation of the living Christ could be so dear to one of His followers that she was disconsolate when she thought it had been stolen away and hidden in some place unknown to His friends, can we be indifferent when, not His lifeless body but His

spirit and His teachings are being removed from the places once hallowed by their presence?

"They have taken away the Lord" from the schools. In some seventeen States the reading of the Bible is not permitted.

In many of the colleges He has ceased to be spoken of as a supernatural character, the only way in which the Bible describes Him, and is known only as a teacher to be compared, and not always favorably, with uninspired teachers. The speculations of the arch atheist, Neitzsche, are sometimes taught when the teachings of Jesus are denied a hearing.

A Substitute Christ.

They have taken the New Testament Christ out of some of the pulpits and out of some of the Sunday Schools, and even out of some of the theological seminaries. The "limitation-Christ" who has been substituted is as inferior to the original as common clay is to refined gold.

Can we be less concerned than Mary at His disappearance?

Mary's sorrow gave place to joy when Jesus, whom she thought dead, appeared and not only confirmed her faith but opened her eyes to the larger significance of His life and work.

Those today who mourn the disappearance of the Saviour from institutions of learning, from many houses of worship, and from a multitude of homes bearing the name of Christian, have no such glad surprise awaiting them. The substitute Christ has

not returned to companionship with the Father which the Bible's Christ temporarily gave up to become the world's Redeemer; on the contrary He has been dragged down from His seat at the right hand of the throne of the Heavenly Father, and from His exalted position as the only begotten Son of God, to the level of man by those who deny His divinity, dispute His intellectual superiority and even question the moral value of His teachings.

Can the Christians of today be less loyal than Mary? Can any who name His Name do less than exclaim, as she did in the early hours of that first Easter Day, "*Rabboni; which is to say, Master,*" and so exclaiming, recognize and acknowledge their risen Saviour and Lord?

XXVII

CHRIST AFTER THE RESURRECTION

LUKE 24: 13-49

QUITE naturally, the report of the Resurrection spread rapidly among the followers of Jesus. In the twenty-fourth chapter of his Gospel, Luke records numerous appearings.

The women who were "last at the cross and first at the tomb" carried to the apostles the news of the empty sepulchre. *"And their words seemed unto them as idle tales, and they believed them not."*

Peter, to verify the account which the women brought, ran to the place where Christ was buried, and finding that He was not there, *"departed, wondering in himself at that which had come to pass."*

On the Road to Emmaus.

Then comes that exquisite story known to all Christian believers as "The Walk to Emmaus." Who that has ever heard or read it can forget the wonderful account of that journey on the which Jesus appeared to two of His followers—obscure men, one mentioned in the New Testament on this occasion only, the other unidentified by name altogether.

These two followers of Christ, depressed and sad at heart, were walking to a village Emmaus, about three-score furlongs from Jerusalem. Christ's Crucifixion and Resurrection was the theme of their conversation. As they communed together, Jesus drew near and went with them, but they did not recognise Him. He engaged them in conversation, inquiring "*what communications are these that ye have one to another, as ye talk, and are sad?*"

The Sceptic's Ancient Questions.

One of the men, named Cleopas, expressed surprise at the question and asked whether their fellow-traveller were a stranger in Jerusalem? They then gave in detail what had occurred. They expressed the general disappointment that Christ had not been "*He which should have redeemed Israel.*" The Resurrection reopened a question that they had considered closed by His death.

How natural the account seems, and how convincing in its accuracy! The sceptics of the day ask no new question; they simply repeat the question asked even then by those who were near to Christ.

It is fortunate that the questions were asked then so that they could be answered then. They were answered and the answers were convincing. Christ appeared so frequently, and to so many, that the fact of His Resurrection became the basis of the Gospel as it was preached from that day on, and the basis of the Church was built upon His Gospel.

The Famous Expression.

Christ rebuked His companions: "*O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into His glory?*" Then, "*beginning at Moses and all the prophets, He expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.*"

They were so drawn to Him that they constrained Him to stop with them. While He sat at meat with them their eyes were opened and they knew Him; and He vanished out of their sight. Here it is that Luke's account reaches its climax with the words uttered by the disciples: "*Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us by the way. . . . . ?*

"While He Talked to us by the Way."

This sentence introduces a kind of proof that is not dependent upon the veracity of Luke. The heart is just as real a part of man as the brain; feeling is just as real as reason and, of the two, has more influence over man's conduct. Our courts recognise this, however much sceptics may scoff at it. Passion can overthrow the reason and, therefore, allowance is made for acts that are the result of passion.

Feeling leads the reason astray and, therefore, a judge is not permitted to preside at a case where his sympathies are known to be on one side, as in the case of the trial of his own child. It is useless to insist that he will be just; an unconscious bias is

even more dangerous that a bias of which one is conscious, and no rectitude of purpose can guard against it.

The Response of Our Hearts.

The proof furnished by the heart is furnished today. We are not dependent upon what people felt nineteen hundred years ago; we can feel now.

Our hearts are stirred today by the words and deeds of Christ; why should we doubt that the hearts of His disciples and immediate followers were stirred?

The response that our own hearts give to His call makes it easy to believe that He rose from the dead and appeared in the flesh to those who, according to the Bible record, saw Him after His Resurrection.

It is the fact of Christ—a fact that we feel and which we know because we feel it—that makes us believe that He was the Christ, conceived of the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, a Worker of miracles—our Crucified and Risen Lord!

Christ Appears and Disappears

Christ disappeared as suddenly as He had appeared, vanishing from their presence while they were at the table.

This supernatural power which Christ manifested, of clothing Himself in the flesh and of putting off the physical body, was manifested on several occasions.

Luke describes Him as coming suddenly into the

midst of the apostles when they were gathered in a room with the doors locked for fear of the Jews.

At this particular time, they were listening to the account of Christ's appearing on the way to Emmaus. "*And as they thus spake, Jesus Himself stood in the midst of them and said, Peace be unto you.*" We are told that they were "*terrified and affrighted,*" and supposed that they beheld a spirit.

It is not strange that they should be easily alarmed; they were in consternation at the Resurrection, not only unexpected by them but surpassing their comprehension. They were troubled, too, lest the wrath of the soldiers might break upon them. To prevent the possibility of the body being removed, the sepulchre had been sealed and the guards doubled. When, in spite of all their precaution, the grave yielded up its prisoner, and explanation had to be manufactured and the followers of Jesus were the only ones upon whom accusation could fall. No enemy of His could be guilty and they dare not admit the real truth.

Soothing Troubled Spirits.

With that tenderness which He ever manifested toward His companions, did Christ sooth their troubled hearts?

He invited them to examine His hands and His feet that they might be sure of His identity. "*Handle Me,*" He said, "*and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see Me have.*"

"*And which they yet believed not for joy, and*

wondered, He said unto them, Have ye here any meat? And they gave Him a piece of broiled fish, and of an honeycomb," and, eating it in their presence, He gave further proof that He was present in the body.

In His communion with them, He called attention to the passages in the law of Moses, in the prophets, and in the psalms concerning Him, reminding them that all of these things must needs be fulfilled.

The Open Mind.

And now we come to one of the pregnant sentences of the text which we are studying—*" Then opened He their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures."*

The open mind is essential to understanding. It is just as easy to close the door of the mind as it is to close the door of a house—as easy to exclude an unwelcome thought or truth as to exclude an unwelcome visitor.

The radio, as we have it today, furnishes us a very apt illustration of the operation of the mind, as it does, also, of the operation of the heart.

The air may be full of sounds of every kind, from speeches interesting or prosy to songs obnoxious or inspiring. If we have a receiver, we can tune in on anything we like; we can shut out all that is valuable and hear only that which is worthless, or we can exclude the bad and hear only that which is good. Our control over the mechanism of the receiver is no more complete than our

control over that which enters the mind or gains admittance to the heart.

Prejudice in its many forms shuts out a vast amount of truth. I travelled on the train recently with a promiment minister who related an experience that he had in Europe.

He fell in with two students who had just graduated from the most prominent university of this minister's denomination. They were on their way to a European university to prepare for teaching in the United States. They had been reared in Christian families, but had become atheists in college. They could see nothing outside of what they called Nature, and when Jesus was mentioned they not only denied His divinity, but rated Him lower than philosophers whom they mentioned.

They called Him "an ignorant peasant who worked in a carpenter shop and knew nothing of the larger phases of life." The language of the Saviour which has been translated into hundreds of languages and has touched the hearts of thousands of millions of every race and in every clime was to them of no value—they had closed their minds and hearts to God, to His inspired Word, and to the call of His only Begotten Son.

The Christian's Desire.

Our hearts will open or close according as we will. The Christian desires that his heart shall be open to divine truth and that his mind may be open also, but one has little trouble with the mind when the heart is right. Just as the mind, at the com-

mand of a bad heart, works as willingly to plot a crime as, under the direction of a good heart, it plans for the welfare of society, so the mind rejects or receives religious truth according to the dispositions of the heart.

When the Christian prays that his heart may be open to suggestion from above, he puts himself in the attitude to receive the promptings that guide us aright. Christ's followers wanted to understand and their desires were answered in the enlightenment that was given to them.

One thing that the risen Christ spoke to his disciples reminds us of the university of His call. "*Thus it is written,*" He said, not only "*that it behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day,*" but that "*repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His Name among all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.*" The Holy City was the starting point, but the ends of the earth were the objectives.

The Vital Fact of the Christian Faith.

One closing thought: The Resurrection of Jesus Christ is the vital fact and principle of the Christian faith. There are some people, calling themselves Christians, go so far as to declare that the Resurrection is immaterial to Christianity. That this position represents the last word in turgid, tangled thinking seems never to cross the minds of those holding it. Can they not see that if Christ did not rise from the dead, then all the Bible records in regard to His appearance to His disciples and

others after death are untrue, and if untrue, the commission which He gave to His disciples in the concluding verses of the last chapter of Matthew, to teach all nations, is fiction and farce?

With irrefutable logic the Apostle Paul states the whole case:

"*But if there be no resurrection of the dead,*" he cries, "*then is Christ not risen: and if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain.*"

He also inscribes the effect that rejection of the Resurrection has on man's philosophy of life:

"*If the dead rise not, let us eat and drink; for tomorrow we die.*"

But Christ *is* risen, "*and become the first fruits of them that slept.*" In this glorious fact the Christian hope is grounded and from it, shall not be moved.

XXVIII

CHRIST AND THE GREAT COMMISSION

MATTHEW 28: 18-20; LUKE 24: 50-53

THE greatest commission ever issued to any organization in the world's history is to be found in the closing verses of the last chapter of Matthew.

The last words that the resurrected Christ spoke to His disciples in Galilee, whither they had gone "*into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them,*" make up the Great Commission:

"*And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.*"

Supplementing the Great Commission, and emphasizing it, are the words of the Saviour to His disciples as set down in the first chapter of Acts—words spoken in answer to a question propounded by His disciples; a question which indicated that even after His Resurrection the disciples did not fully comprehend the spiritual nature of His kingdom.

The Commission was so vast a conception that they could not grasp its import. A feeble band of Jews, lying under a foreign yoke and despised by the influential among their own people, were commanded to carry the Gospel to all creatures everywhere! It would have been a stupendous undertaking enough had they been entrusted with a pleasant message; but it was the most offensive message that they could possibly have carried.

Repentance is a harsh word; it implies sin already committed. It is an indictment of the life of those to whom it is addressed. There is no trial; no accusation and defense; it is a judgment declared and a stern demand made for a change in the life—in the whole purpose of the life. The guilty supply the proof; their own conscience makes witnesses unnecessary. They come with bowed heads and plead guilty; then behold the reward—the remission of sin! Each individual can pardon offences committed against him, but God alone and His only begotten Son can forgive sin—crime against the Heavenly Father.

Christ's Witnesses.

Christ's first followers asked Him: *"Wilt Thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?"* *"It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in His own power,"* was His reply.

Their curiosity was about a matter which did not concern them, but while their question was not one that could be answered with propriety, the Sav-

iour gave them information that did concern them and which was of much greater importance. He informed them that they would receive power when the Holy Ghost came upon them and that they would then be His witnesses "*both in Jerusalem, and in all Judæa, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.*"

He had prepared them for the work unto which they were called, and now He was about to leave them. Others would bear hearsay testimony, but His disciples were to give the testimony of eyewitnesses.

Persecution scattered them into many places and the evidence which they gave by voice, by life, and by death has been carried far and wide. If "*the uttermost part of the earth*" has not yet been reached, it will be, for no earthly power can stay the spread of Christ's Gospel.

"*To All Nations.*"

Dr. Robert F. Horton relates that the missionary, John Geddes, has been honoured by the following epitaph in one of the islands of the Southern Seas:

"When he came, in 1848, there was not a Christian; when he left, in 1872, there was not a single heathen."

"So," adds Dr. Horton, "it will be said of this island planet in the ocean of the universe which was visited by the Divine Missionary, 'When He came, there was not a Christian in it; when He left it, there was not a heathen.'"

But to return to the Great Commission: It will be noticed that there are four superlative statements.

His disciples were sent out to teach all the nations, or, as the Revised Version has it, "*make disciples of all nations.*" Here we have an universal Gospel—every human being. There is not living today, anywhere, a single man or woman who is beyond the reach of Christ's call. "*Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavn laden,*" means just what it says, namely, *all.* No nation is excepted.

An Extraordinary Command.

What an extraordinary command when we remember how many different shades of colour there are and how various are the forms of government! It is not conceivable that anyone would dare to give such a commission if He were not possessed of a supernatural power and of a vision that transcended human knowledge. Matthew could not be in error in recording these words because no one could have imagined any such claim to power and authority.

There are many religious teachers and many forms of religion, but Christ makes no distinction between them. In a few simple words He made a survey of mankind, grouped them into nations, and calmly and confidently commissioned His disciples to convert them all, and to perform the sacred rite that symbolizes the washing away of sin and the purifying of the heart—"*baptizing them in the*

name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."

Having provided for the gathering of all the people of all the earth into His Church, He proceeded to instruct His disciples as to what they were to say. They were to teach *" them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you."*

What to Teach.

His followers were not left in darkness as to what particular parts of His teachings were to be proclaimed. Nor were they left free to pick out the doctrines which they liked best or to emphasize the lessons which seemed to them most appropriate, omitting the rest. He who spake as *" never man spake"* uttered nothing that was not worthy to be repeated over and over again.

This command of our Saviour comes with special appropriateness at this time when some professing Christians assume to censor His utterances and to eliminate such as do not conform to their judgment.

He gave the world a way by which forgiveness of sins may be secured; He took our sins upon Him; *"by His stripes we are healed";* and He also gave a perfect code of morals applicable to every situation and to every day of our lives. He put in nothing that was unnecessary and, therefore, we cannot discard anything that He included.

In reading Matthew's verses which form the Great Commission, one is at a loss to know which sentence embodies the climax. It is difficult to

conceive of anything more wonderful than a universal Gospel and it is hard to imagine anything more important than the presentation of that Gospel in its fullness and completeness. And yet what can be more thrilling than His promise to stand by His followers and second their efforts throughout all the ages, however long they may be drawn out: *"Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world!"*

Men rise and reign and pass away; nations are born, go through a period of glory and die; civilizations wax and wane, but Jesus sheds a light undimmed by time and moves with majesty through unfolding ages—the abiding strength of all who put their trust in Him. As the presence of a parent allays the fears of a child, so the presence of Christ supplies the strength needed in hours of darkness and trial.

At Every Council Table.

Christ is not only the "silent guest" in every home that welcomes Him, but He sits at every council table where the welfare of man is under consideration. As He met every suggestion of Satan in the season of temptation by answering, *"It is written,"* so we can find in His recorded words a solution for every problem that confronts us today or may arise hereafter.

But even the promise of His presence cannot surpass, in its power to encourage, the claims which He made to omnipotence: *"All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth."*

It might seem sufficient for Christ to have all power on earth, where His followers are in daily conflict with *"the world, the flesh, and the devil,"* but the present life is but a small arc of the infinite circle of existence and Christ has the power to guarantee the rewards promised in the next world as well as the rewards promised in the present life.

Does the Christian Church realize the power that is back of it?

It has faith in God's power—the Infinite power of a Creator. It has faith in the power of its crucified and risen Saviour. But does it realize that all power in heaven and in earth is available for the protection of God's children and for the establishment of righteousness in the world?

"O, Ye of Little Faith!"

Christ often rebuked those of His day with the phrase, *"O, ye of little faith";* what language would He employ if He were here today and administered a rebuke?

The Church is the greatest organization we have and is our only hope in the securing of moral reforms. The Church was the outstanding influence in the securing of national Prohibition; it exerted more influence than any other one factor in the bringing of woman suffrage, which will in turn be felt in the settlement of every important question in all the future.

The Church has expended its energy with great effect in advancing the cause of international peace, and aided in securing a reduction in the hours

of labour (from twelve to eight) for the employees of the greatest corporation in the nation.

When we examine what the Church has done and is doing the work seems very large, but it is small in comparison with the work which needs to be done and which could be done if all who profess Christ's name applied His teachings to life.

The Final Earthly Scene.

And now we come to the final earthly scene in the life of our Lord. "*And He led out so far as to Bethany,*" writes Luke, "*and He lifted up His hands and blessed them. And it came to pass, while He blessed them, and was parted from them and carried up into heaven. And they worshipped Him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy.*"

Is this fiction? Who could have imagined such a story as is here told? Truth is ever stranger than fiction, and here we have truth vindicated by nineteen centuries of history and experience.

These Chosen Companions, depressed by the crucifixion, surprised by the Resurrection, and terrified and affrighted by the reappearance of the Master, go forth from communion with Him bold as lions, heroes of faith and many of them martyrs to the cause—how shall we account for the transformation except as it is accounted for in the Gospels?

They were "*continually in the Temple, blessing God.*" Something had entered into them—something that wholly revolutionized their thought, their attitude, their conduct. What was it, if not the

actual, bodily Resurrection of their Crucified Lord?

And, let it be remembered that the fulfillment of some of the promises came centuries after the promises were made and published. The plan was unfolded by Christ as far as it could be unfolded *at the time.* It has been unfolding ever since without a pause, without a break.

Who, if his mind be open and his heart willing to receive the truth, can doubt that the unfolding will continue until "*every knee shall bow and every tongue confess*"?

"So be it, Lord; Thy throne shall never,
Like earth's proud empires, pass away;
But stand, and rule, and grow, for ever,
'Till all Thy creatures own Thy sway."

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